

# NFL PREVIEW 2013

68 PAGES OF  
SCOUTING  
REPORTS

DOUBLE  
ISSUE

SEPTEMBER 2, 2013  
SI.COM

# Sports Illustrated



THEMMQB.COM

**PETER KING'S  
SUPER BOWL  
PREDICTION**

Patriots vs.  
Seahawks

P. 68

**THE READ-  
OPTION**

The Scheme  
That Has Taken  
Over Football—and  
How to Stop It

P. 38

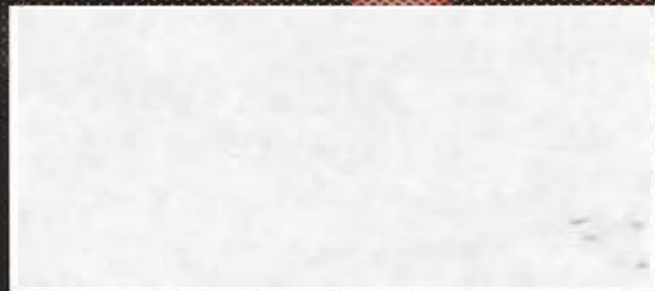
**THE READER  
OPTION**

Turn for Three  
More Covers

## THE NEW KINGS

+ WHY RG3 = JOHN ELWAY

WHEN YOU'RE BORN TO RUN, IT DOESN'T  
MEAN YOU CAN'T BE THE GUNSLINGER







YOU KNOW  
YOU'VE MADE IT WHEN  
THEY SEND THE BEST  
IN AFTER YOU.

.....*Crown Royal*.....  
**REIGN ON**  
.....





# NFL PREVIEW 2013

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REPORTS

# Spoils

SEPTEMBER 2, 2013  
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## THE NEW KINGS

+ WHY ANDREW LUCK = PEYTON MANNING

WHEN YOU LOSE A LEGEND,  
IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE  
OUT OF LUCK







BELIEVE  
UNTIL YOU MAKE  
BELIEVERS.

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# NFL PREVIEW 2013

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REPORTS

# Sports

SEPTEMBER 2, 2013  
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## THE NEW KINGS

+ WHY RUSSELL WILSON = DREW BREES

WHEN YOU'RE BARELY SIX FEET,  
IT DOESN'T MEAN YOUR CAREER  
IS SIX FEET UNDER





WHEN YOU  
SEE THE FLASHBULBS  
YOU'RE THERE.

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# SPORTS

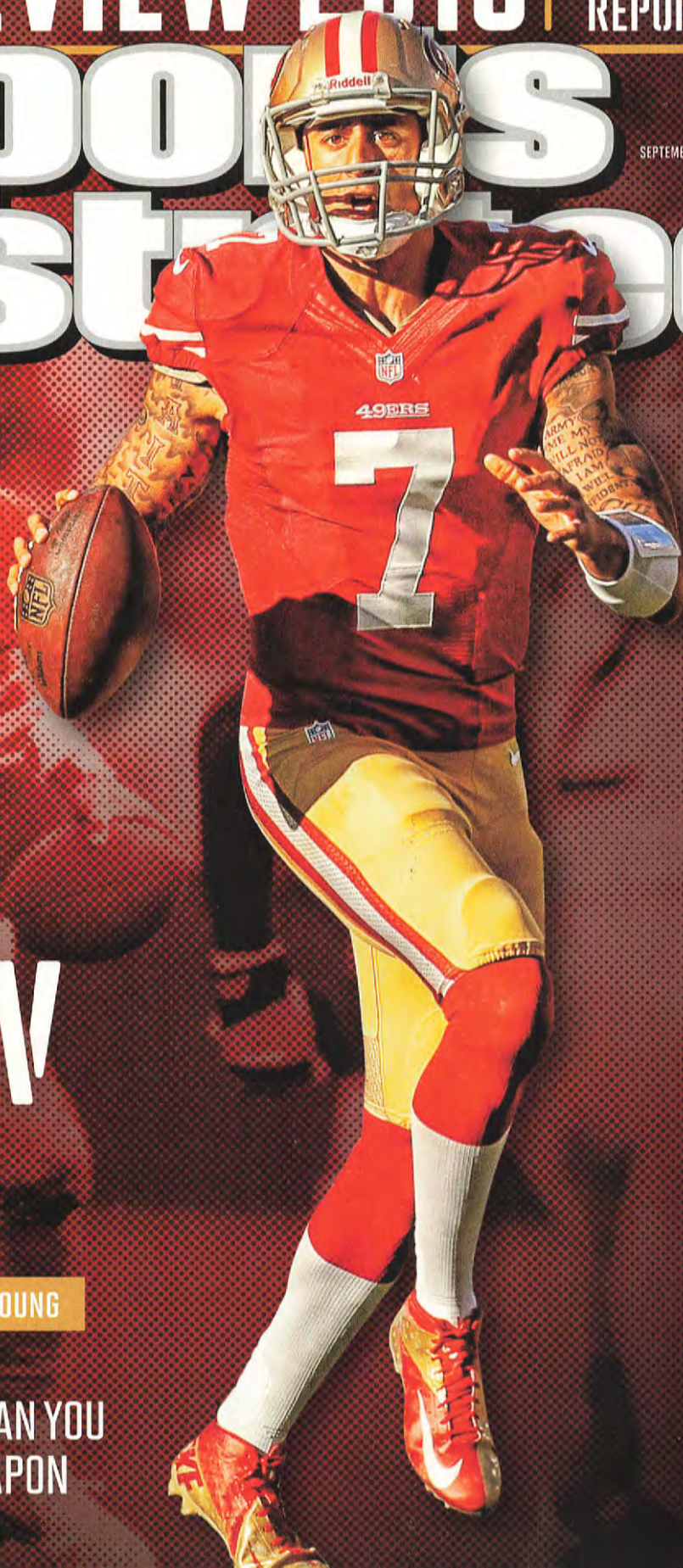
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## THE NEW KINGS

+ WHY COLIN KAEPERNICK = STEVE YOUNG

WHEN YOU CAN PLAY FAST  
AND LOOSE, IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU  
CAN'T BE A PRECISION WEAPON







# VICTORY SETS ITS OWN STANDARDS.

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honors ambition with its own coronation.  
An epic standard. Celebrate.





# NFL FOOTBALL PREVIEW

# 2013



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How to stop the hottest new offensive scheme

By Greg A. Bedard

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Structure was the key for the Cowboys' wideout

By Austin Murphy

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**Sports Illustrated**

# Lineup

SI HAS FOUR REGIONAL COVERS THIS WEEK: ROBERT BECK/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MANNING, WILSON); CARY EDMONDSON/USA TODAY SPORTS (KAEPERNICK); BILL FRANKS/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (BREES); ANDREW HANCOCK FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (LUCK); PETER READ MILLER FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ELWAY, YOUNG); AL TIELEMANS/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (GRIFFIN)

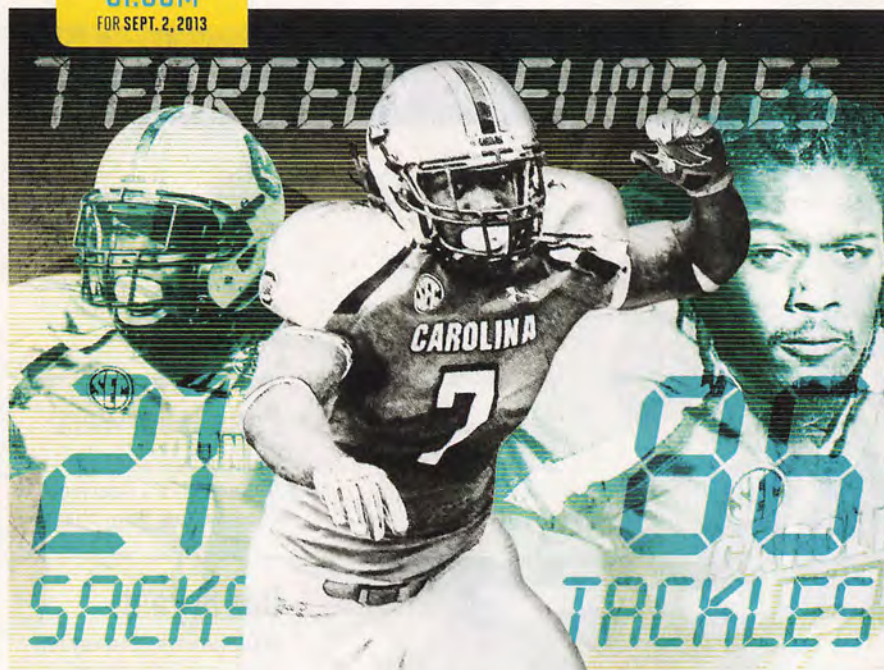


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SI.COM  
FOR SEPT. 2, 2013



Digital



From now through the end of the college and pro football seasons, as well as during the 2014 Winter Olympics, **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** will regularly feature the most intriguing on-the-climb athletes across all its platforms. To see a video on this week's Rising Star, Bills running back **C.J. Spiller**, on your computer or mobile device, go to [SI.com/risingstars](http://SI.com/risingstars)

MMQB

## Prospect Heights

The NFL draft is still nine months away, but one name is atop everyone's board as the odds-on favorite to go No. 1:

**Jadeveon Clowney.** The South Carolina defensive end's ferocious pass-rushing skills make him college football's premier defender. But what about the other top draft contenders? This season **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** senior writer Andy Staples will rank college football's top 50 draft prospects each week, breaking down their on-field performances and what they need to do to improve their stock before selection day next May. Go to [TheMMQB.com](http://TheMMQB.com)

### SI PHOTO



**SI.com** celebrates the U.S. Open with a collection of iconic images from Flushing Meadows, including this shot of **Martina Navratilova** in the 1984 championship final, when she beat Chris Evert 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 to win her second Open singles title and sixth straight Grand Slam event.

### SI NOW



Check out **SI NOW**, **SI.com**'s daily live talk show, hosted by Maggie Gray at 1 p.m. EST, for news and analysis with **SI** writers and guests like *Fast N' Loud*'s Richard Rawlings and Aaron Kaufman (above), who stopped by to discuss creating custom cars for Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Mark Cuban.

## SI DIGITAL BONUS

### Bird Calls

From *TheMMQB*

We went behind the scenes when Bruce Arians, the Cardinals' rookie head coach, taught Larry Fitzgerald and friends a critical element of Arizona's new offense—and how the minutiae of the game can be the difference between winning and losing.

By Peter King

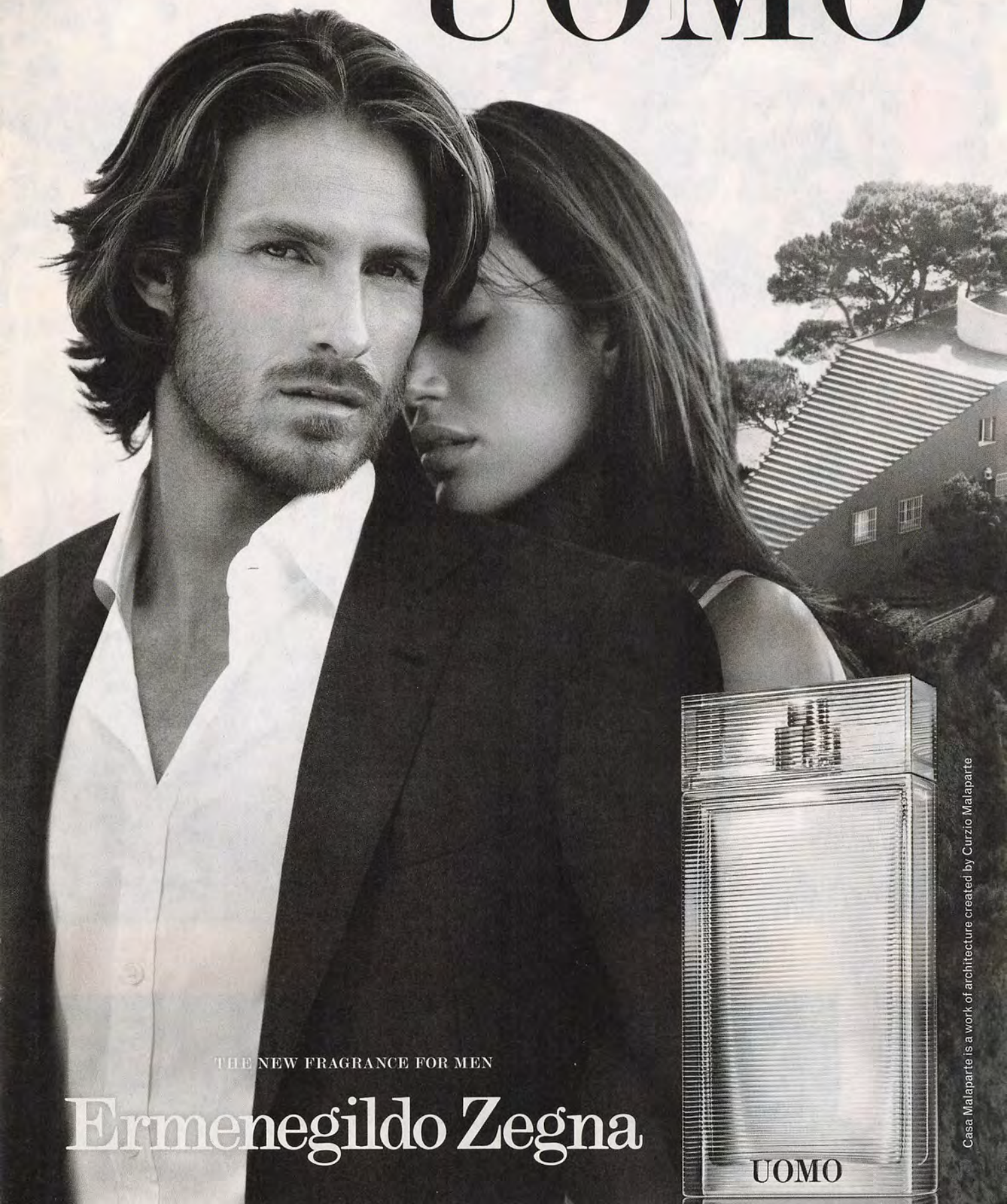


CLOWNEY PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY NICOLE ZIGMONT; FROM LEFT, JIM OEDMON/CON SM; GERRY MELENDEZ/MCT/ABACUS.COM; SIMON BRUTY/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; DAMIAN STROHMEYER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (SPILLER); CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES (ARIANS AND FITZGERALD); NEIL LEFFER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY IMAGES (NAVATILOVA)



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# UOMO



THE NEW FRAGRANCE FOR MEN

# Ermenegildo Zegna



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1 of 3



Leading  
Off

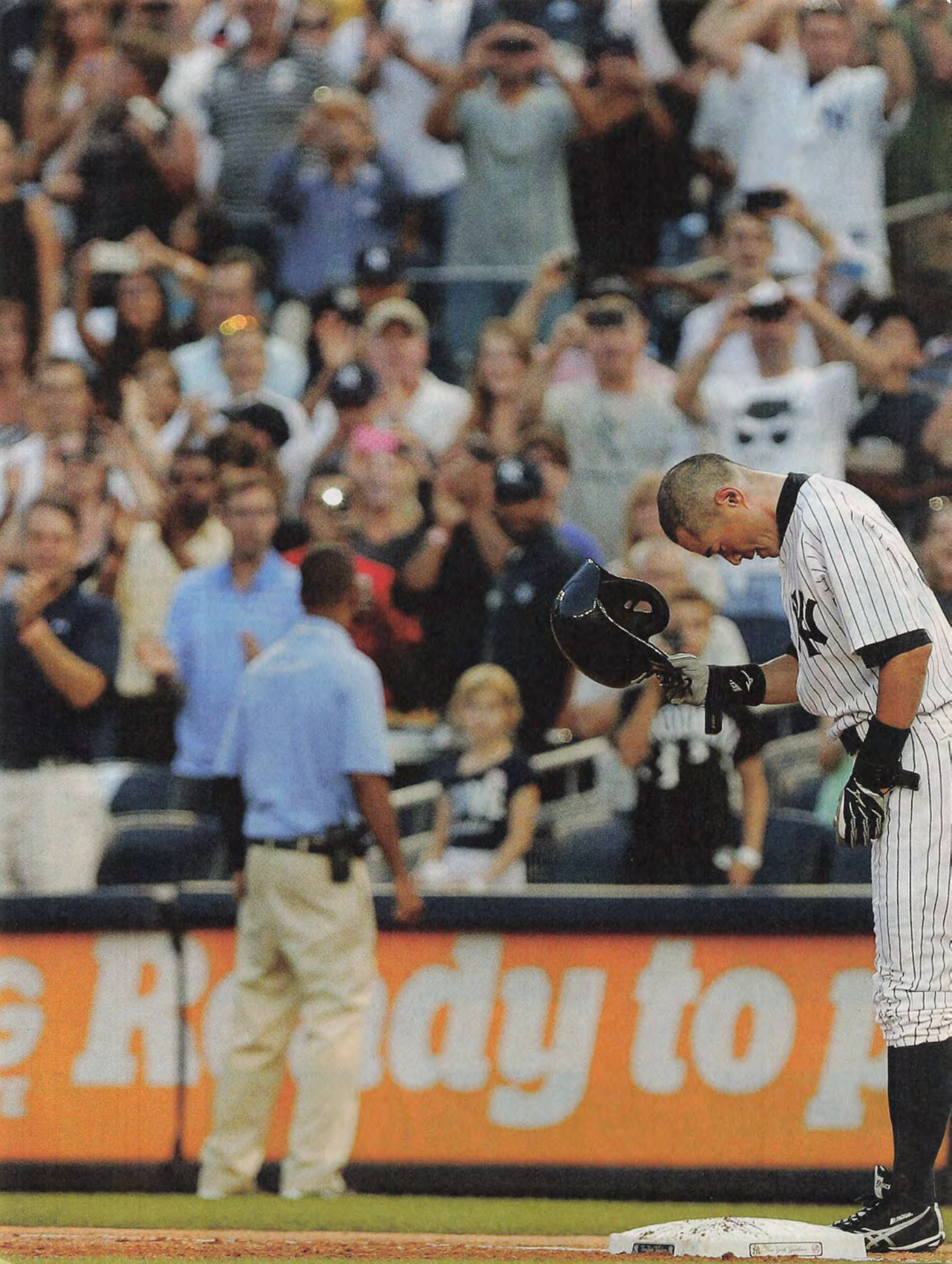
## Kings Among Kids

■ This is getting to be a familiar sight in Williamsport, Pa.: a team from Japan celebrating the Little League World Series championship. The boys from Tokyo rallied in the final on Sunday to beat Chula Vista, Calif., 6-4; the game ended when Japan snuffed out a rally by turning a slick double play. This is Japan's second straight title, its third in four years and ninth overall. The U.S. [33] and Taiwan [17] are the only nations with more.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
**EDUARDO MUNOZ/**  
REUTERS

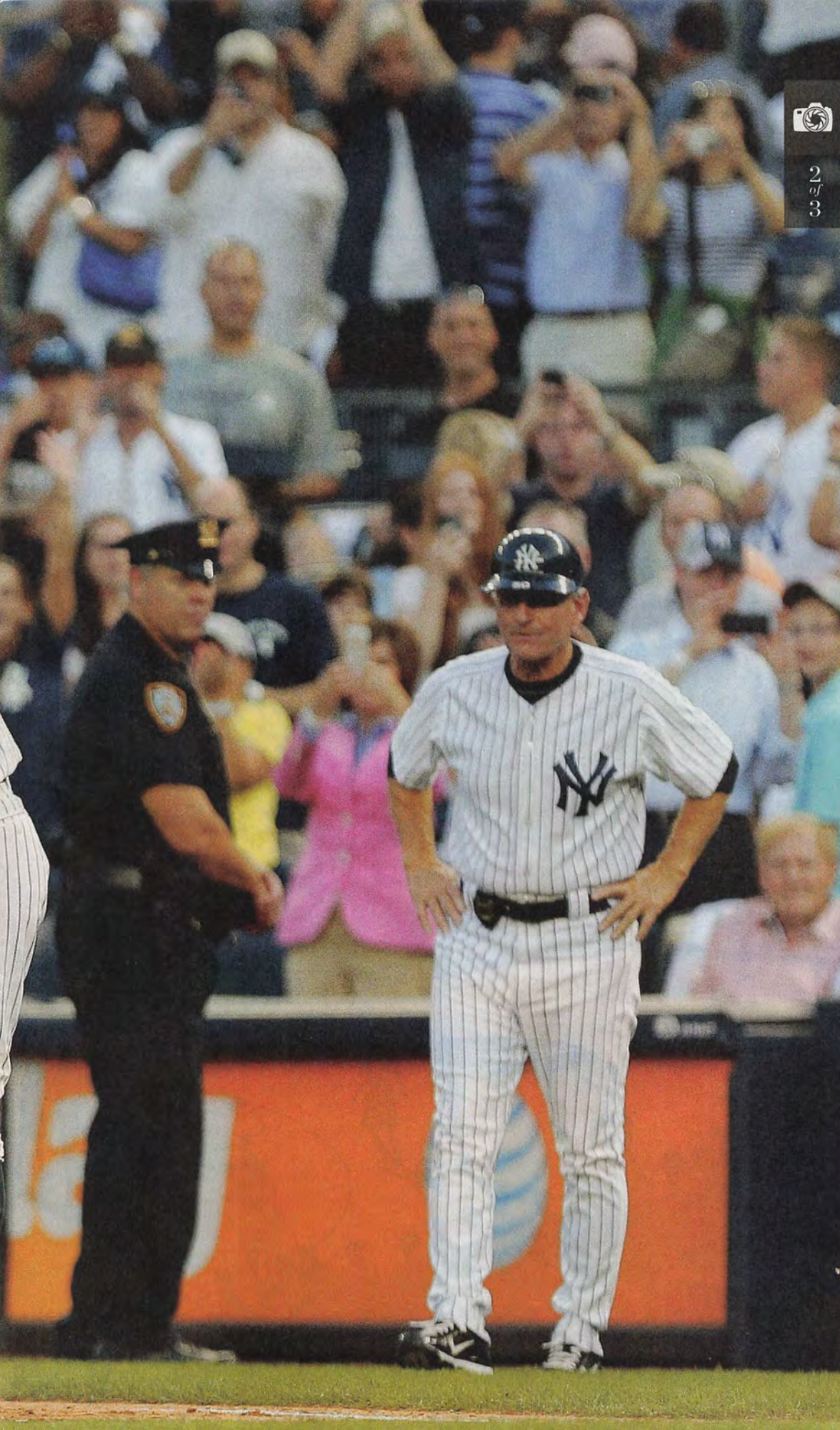






Ready to





2009



**Leading  
Off**

## Four Grand Standing

■ Yankees outfielder Ichiro Suzuki took a well-deserved bow on Aug. 21 after stroking the 2,722nd hit of his major league career—which, when added to the 1,278 he had in Japan from 1992 to 2000, gave him 4,000 as a professional. (Only Pete Rose and Ty Cobb have had more hits at the highest levels of pro ball.) As for those who think facing subpar competition in Japan helped Ichiro, 39, inflate his stats, remember this: His MLB hits total—he was up to 2,725 at week's end—is the highest ever for any player in his first 13 seasons.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
**FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP**









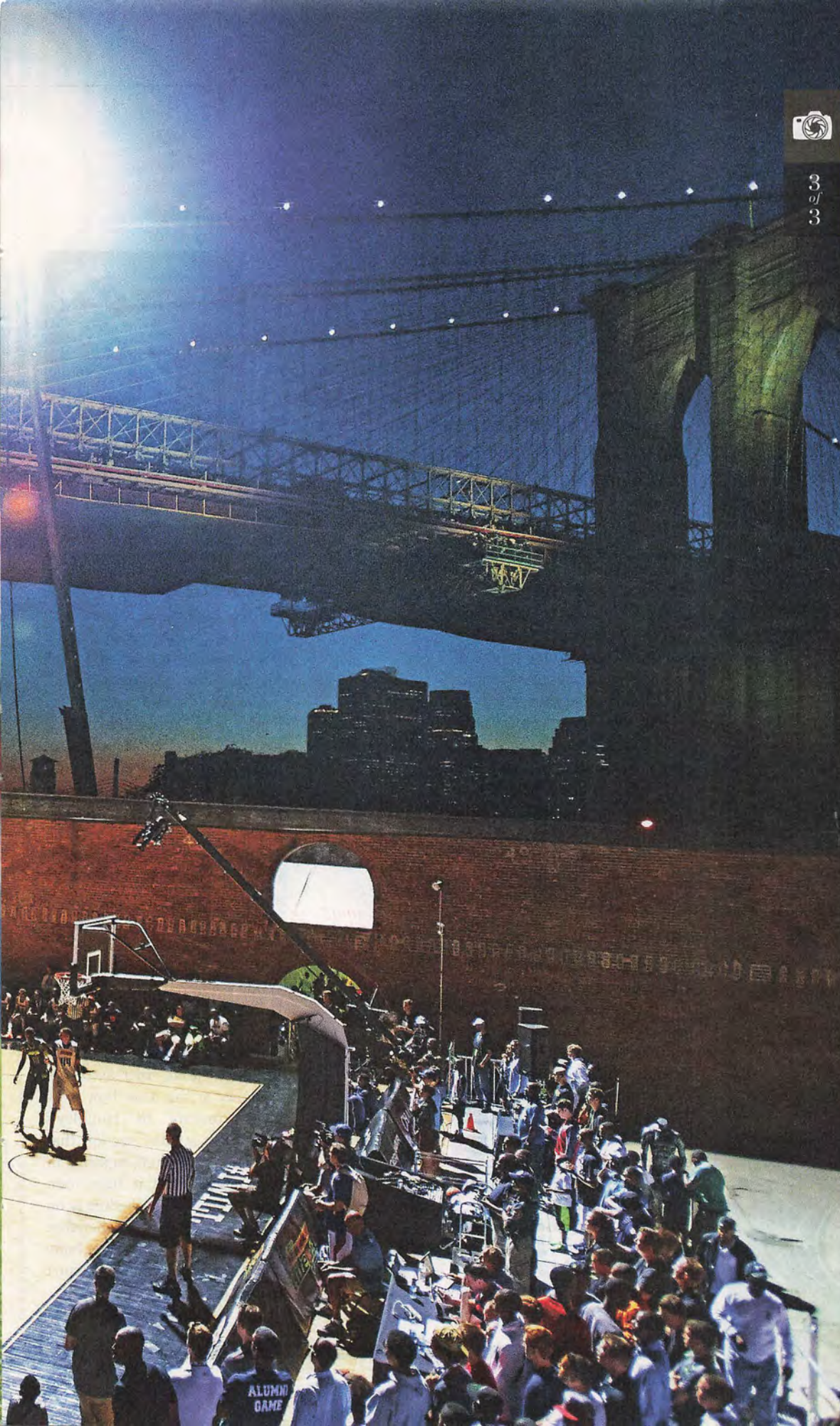
3  
of  
3

Leading  
Off

## Bridge Jumper

■ Myles Turner of Trinity High in Euless, Texas, launched from the top of the key in the Under Armour Elite 24 last Saturday. The game took place under the Brooklyn Bridge in what's left of an abandoned tobacco warehouse. Two dozen of the nation's top high school players were chosen to participate, and the biggest news came at halftime, when point guard Emmanuel Mudiay of Prime Prep Academy in Fort Worth, Texas, announced he was snubbing Kentucky to play for Larry Brown at SMU.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
**PORTER BINKS**  
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





# THE ULTIMATE FIGHTER

GENDER.



Coach Ronda Rousey



Premieres Sept. 4

## THE MAIL

FOR AUG. 19, 2013

*L. Jon Wertheim was right on the money (pun intended) on why men cheat in sports (SCORECARD). It's all about the dollars. The penalties for cheating will never be big enough to deter a player who is only thinking about getting paid. Maybe you can understand why a kid from a very poor background would cheat, but guys like Ryan Braun and Alex Rodriguez, who are already multimillionaires? To me, that is unforgivable.*

Esteban R. Lugo, Maple Grove, Minn.



### Anchors Aweigh

Brian Curtis's masterful story on the 1942 Rose Bowl (*War and Roses*) highlighted a type of courage and selflessness among men that is often rare in today's society. Every time I cross Dethman Ridge Road (named after then Oregon State halfback Bob Dethman's family) in Hood River, Ore., I am reminded of how the '42 game revealed that integrity and heroism are not defined by geography, class or race.

Sean Corcoran, Hood River, Ore.

There's one interesting fact from the '42 Rose Bowl regarding Duke quarterback Tommy Prothro that was not mentioned in Curtis's article. Like many of the players from Duke and Oregon State, Prothro joined the Navy during WWII, serving as a lieutenant for 39 months. In '55 he took over as head coach of Oregon State's football team, leading the Beavers to two Rose Bowls ('57, '65) and a record of 63-37-2.

David A. Birch, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

### Hot Prospects

As a die-hard Twins fan who for several years has felt the

void of not having a competitive squad, I appreciated your article on minor league prospects Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano (*Glimmer Twins*). Sure, Torii Hunter was a great leader and outfielder during his 10 years in Minnesota, and Joe Mauer has been a phenomenal hitter on the current roster. However, not since the great Kirby Puckett have the Twins had a player with such transcendent all-around skills as Buxton or Sano.

Dan Chang, Woodbury, Minn.

### Excused Absence

While I enjoyed your article on UCLA quarterback Brett Hundley (SCORECARD), author Andy Staples was a bit off in his assumption that increased attendance at the Rose Bowl was due primarily to Hundley's play ("The student section that wasn't even at half capacity in September?"). As it turns out, UCLA's academic schedule is on the quarter system. Therefore the majority of the student body doesn't arrive on campus to start classes until late September.

Bob Locke, Glendale, Ariz.

*Who can beat Bama? Probably Ohio State, Oregon or Stanford if the Crimson Tide would dare play in their stadiums.*

Tom Lang  
Scottsdale, Ariz.





## Team Building

Staples's feature on the huddle (*Too Old School?*) was a great read. I've long made the argument that the huddle wasn't just meant for calling plays. It was also meant to be a place for the quarterback to rally the troops on the field. In the huddle a good QB often challenges and motivates his teammates to go beyond their limits. Looking a teammate in the eye and saying, "We need to do this" or "You can do that" is much more powerful than any hand or voice signal on the line of scrimmage.

*Mike Janney, Houston*

## Cardinal Sin?

Seeing Stanford ranked No. 2 in the SI Top 25 poll made me think, Stanford? Wow. How is an elite educational institution doing this well against all of these other dominant athletic programs? Then I read the article on Shayne Skov (*Revenge of the Nerd*), who got into Stanford despite being thrown off the football team at one school and getting a DUI and subsequent suspension for an academic quarter at another. The answer became clear: Stanford does it just like everybody else.

*G.D. Holcombe, Minocqua, Wis.*

That Nebraska could have been left out of your preseason poll is incomprehensible. Look at the talent of the Cornhuskers' returning starters on offense and the fact that they play just four games on the road all season. Those two things alone should get them a spot on your list.

*Ron Freiburger, Omaha*

## SOCIAL MEDIA

**With the Jets still searching for a No. 1 quarterback, do you think coach Rex Ryan should be fired?**



**Adam Ragle** No. They need to fire G.M.

John Idzik and get someone who knows what they're doing. Mark Sanchez is not an NFL-quality quarterback, and they still have no talent at any of the skill positions.



**Ryan Barthel** I would fire him today.

The Jets keep giving Ryan chances, but he fails over and over again. Who plays their starting QB in the fourth quarter behind a second-string [offensive] line during a preseason game?



**Jim Kennedy** I think Ryan has some

kind of man crush on Sanchez. Hence the reason Tim Tebow hardly played and Greg McElroy doesn't play. The Jets should have gotten rid of Ryan instead of Tebow.



## TWEET OF THE WEEK



Hey @McElroyRory - I'm working on my short game. [Only a few strokes behind my niece Fiona and nephew Simon.]

[pic.twitter.com/8xUbkkYVKS](http://pic.twitter.com/8xUbkkYVKS)

**Bill Clinton** (@billclinton)

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# THE ULTIMATE FIGHTER

WAR.



Coach **Miesha Tate**



Premieres Sept. 4



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*Faces in the  
Crowd*

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*Dan Patrick  
J.J. Watt*

# +Scorecard

Edited by MARK BECHTEL



**It's hard to believe**  
that 38-year-old  
Yankees third

baseman/wrestling heel Alex Rodriguez was once a teenager enrolled at a small private high school in Palmetto Bay, Fla. His skill, his build and his personality all fall so many standard deviations from the mean that A-Rod must have been forged in a lab somewhere, unleashed upon major league baseball only after 18 years of troubleshooting. But, no, no matter when his PED use started, he was a kid once, I swear.

Evidence of his youth is right here, preserved for all time in a *USA Today* story from April 1993: "Pressure is overrated if you keep everything in perspective. . . . The key is to stay humble, credit your coaches, teammates and the Lord," the 17-year-old senior who was the country's top-rated high school player told the reporter from a national newspaper.

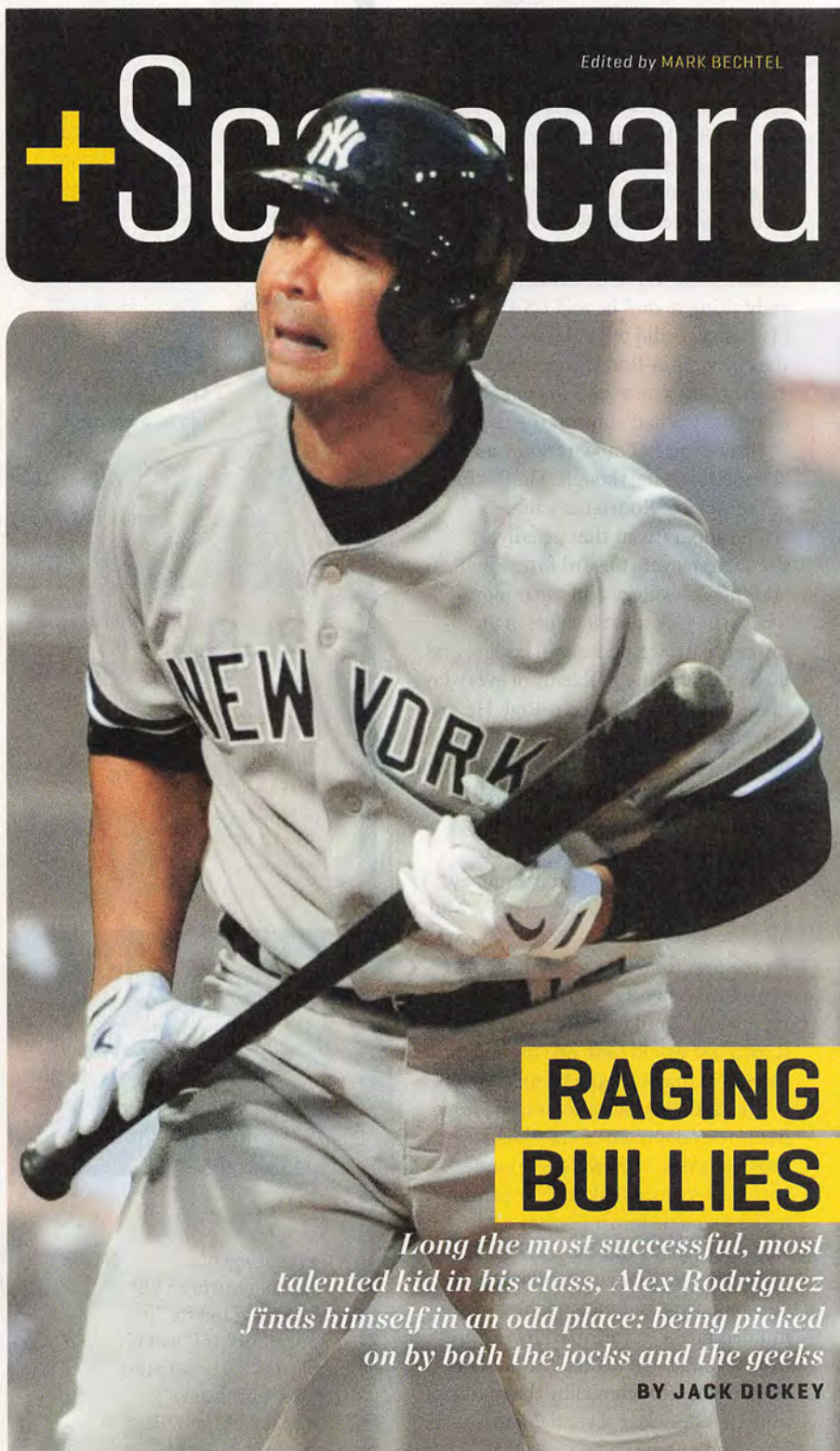
Oh, right. His formative years were nothing like ours; hell, he had been featured in *SI* a month before *USA Today* came calling. He was already broken then, spouting the focus-grouped clichés that so many other athletes use to hide from the media and revealing in the process that he wasn't entirely sure how to deploy them. (A tip, Alex, 20 years late: You're supposed to *do* those things, not tell the reporter that you will do them.) The machine had made him a star, and he hadn't even left high school.

I've got high school on my mind because the Yankees, since Rodriguez's return in

## RAGING BULLIES

*Long the most successful, most talented kid in his class, Alex Rodriguez finds himself in an odd place: being picked on by both the jocks and the geeks*

BY JACK DICKEY





early August, have conjured no other image. The quality of his team's play has been better than what you'd see at Westminster Christian School—even with Eduardo Núñez and Lyle Overbay playing every day—but the emotional climate couldn't be more frenzied and more petty. The homecoming king got caught stuffing the ballot box, and the rest of the class has done nothing but gossip, shriek and bully.

Even the nerds are going after him. Yankees G.M. Brian Cashman has said he cannot talk to A-Rod because of the "litigious environment" Rodriguez's attorneys have created by questioning the judgment of the Yankees' medical staff. (Was there no such litigious environment when the Yankees' attorneys investigated voiding Rodriguez's contract after the Biogenesis story broke?) And team president Randy Levine has gone full birther on Rodriguez, demanding he produce his medical records for public consumption.

The league took Rodriguez on, too. On the *Today* show, while chatting with Rodriguez's lawyer, the usually fuzzy Matt Lauer whipped out an authorized letter from Major League Baseball, waiving confidentiality for this particular drug case. Who knew 79-year-old Bud Selig and his lieutenants had such a flair for the dramatic?

But the worst treatment, as it so often does, has come from the jocks. Red Sox pitcher John Lackey told the press that Rodriguez had no right to play while his suspension was under appeal. "I've got a problem with it. You bet I do," he said. While presumably happy with the union's accomplishments when it ensures that he's guaranteed to receive every penny of his silly \$82.5 million contract, however mediocre he might be, Lackey is contemptuous of the union when it guarantees players suspended for arbitrary lengths of time the right to see an arbitrator.

Ryan Dempster, Lackey's rotation-mate, didn't bother critiquing

Rodriguez in the press. He simply threw at him, on *Sunday Night Baseball*, as the Fenway crowd whooped. The fans applauded, too, as Dempster exited the game. (He had allowed four runs in 5½ innings and left the bases loaded. All the runners would score, and the Red Sox lost.) It was *Carrie*-style bullying, abetted by schadenfreude-happy bystanders. Only one of Dempster's teammates, David Ortiz, dared question his teammate's mission: "I didn't like it. I don't think it was the right thing to do," he told *USA Today*. (Two players did tell SI last week that they thought A-Rod was getting a raw deal, but they only said so once the conversation had gone off the record.)

Ortiz's voice of moderation was sounded too late, though. That's kind of the story of Rodriguez's life.

The apparatuses that usually shepherd players toward functional adulthood—college and the minors, where the jock must survive in an unfamiliar town on a small budget and do battle with the problems of everyday life—never came to help A-Rod. He played baseball too well to need them, debuting in the majors before he turned 19 and finishing second in the MVP voting at 20. By 1998 he had power, speed and plate discipline in excess. By 2001 he was making more money than anyone in the game's history. And by 2004 he was in New York, playing for the first time on a team that could expect to contend for a title every year. It appeared until recently as though Rodriguez would have one of the best careers in major league history.

That's all baseball success, of course. But no development of emotional intelligence or self-awareness came with it—hitting a ball very far cannot make someone into a new man. Rodriguez looks like baseball's answer to Michael Jackson, a singularly gifted but immature and inescapably single-minded talent, scrutinized by the press from a young age without a shred of empathy, so threatened by the march of time that he asked several doctors to fix him. Don't plunk; pity. □

Go Fig

19-1



**Max Scherzer's** record after he outdueled the Mets' Matt Harvey 3-0 last Saturday. The Tigers' righty joined Rube Marquard of the 1912 Giants and Roger Clemens of the 2001 Yankees as the only pitchers to win 19 of their first 20 decisions.

8

**Tons of sand used to construct the sculpture that the Rays presented to Mariano Rivera on his farewell tour.**



3-0

**The Diamondbacks' record this season in games that have**

**lasted at least 16 innings after their 12-7, 18-inning win over the Phillies last Saturday, which lasted more than seven hours and saw two Philadelphia position players pitch.**



\$293.90

**Average price of a Notre Dame football ticket on secondary markets, the highest in the country,**

**according to Forbes. Defending champ Alabama was eighth, at \$179.**

53%

**Percentage of respondents in an ESPN poll who voted for "It doesn't matter" when asked who should start at QB for the Jets.**

**Geno Smith** got 34% and Mark Sanchez 13%.





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# You've Got to See This

*The best matchups the NFL has to offer in the first half of the 2013 season*

BY JIM TROTTER

## WEEK 1 Falcons at Saints



The Superdome will be rocking with the return of coach Sean Payton, who missed the 2012 season while serving a league suspension for his role in Bountygate. The game—a Thursday night matchup that kicks off the 2013 season—is also a grudge match between teams that have combined to win the last four NFC South titles.



*Drew Brees led the league with 5,177 yards through the air—but the Saints were 31st in passing defense (4,681 yards).*

**DALLAS LEADS THE ALLTIME SERIES 62-42-2**



## WEEK 5 Texans at 49ers

You could view this as a dark-horse Super Bowl preview, particularly with the AFC's being so wide open. Houston will want to stake its claim during this prime-time matchup against the defending NFC champs. Texans end J.J. Watt might be the game's best defensive player, and Kaepernick is among the top young dual-threat QBs.

## WEEK 2 49ers at Seahawks



This NFC West showdown is so big it overshadows Manning versus Manning and the Steelers' trip to Cincinnati. Each team has a standout young QB [San Fran's Colin Kaepernick and Seattle's Russell Wilson], a punishing running game and a physical, stingy defense. Oh, and the two coaches don't particularly care for each other. Definitely must-see.



## WEEK 6 Redskins at Cowboys

Robert Griffin III, Tony Romo, Dez Bryant—plus Jerry's World and all the drama and angst that comes with that. What more could you want? Dallas swept the series two years ago, but had the favor returned last season, when Washington won the winner-take-all finale to claim its first NFC East title since 1999.

## WEEK 3 Chiefs at Eagles



Despite nine winning seasons, five NFC title game appearances and one trip to the Super Bowl, Andy Reid was fired after 14 years with the Eagles. Now he returns to Philadelphia for the first time. On the other sideline is first-year coach Chip Kelly, an offensive innovator at Oregon who is trying to show that his up-tempo strategies will work on the NFL level.



*Miller set a team record with 18½ sacks last season.*

**IN 2012 NEW ENGLAND WAS 11-1 AGAINST THE AFC, JUST 1-3 AGAINST THE NFC.**



## WEEK 7 Broncos at Colts

For the first time since being released by the Colts after the 2011 season, Peyton Manning returns to the House That He Built: Lucas Oil Stadium. A different type of return could be just as important. Broncos linebacker Von Miller will be eligible to play following a six-game league suspension for violating the league's substance abuse policy.

## WEEK 4 Patriots at Falcons



If the NFL had a third-place game, this would have been last year's matchup. These two teams, each of which finished one win shy of reaching the Super Bowl, will be in the hunt again. If you enjoy offense—well, no beer runs or bathroom breaks here. These clubs rank No. 1 [Pats] and No. 4 [Falcons] in scoring over the past three seasons.



## WEEK 8 Packers at Vikings

Minnesota running back Adrian Peterson obliterated the Green Bay defense last season, rushing for 210 and 199 yards against the unit in a five-game span. [In fact, he has run for at least 175 yards in three of his past four against the Packers.] Even if he has another big game, Green Bay's explosive offense will keep things close.



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## A Rare Long Ball



Thirty-six years ago, on Aug. 29, 1977, the Indians hosted the White Sox.

Cleveland's second baseman that night was Duane Kuiper, who had hit zero career home runs in 1,381 major league at bats.

**Rick Manning** [former teammate] Kuiper knew how to play the game. He was a great second baseman. He was as tough as you could get for a guy 175 pounds. Back then, the game was pitching and defense.

**Duane Kuiper** I'd hit some homers [seven, to be exact] in the minor leagues.

**Manning** We weren't there to hit home runs. Frank Robinson was our manager, and he'd stand out behind the screen and make Kuip and I [who both batted lefthanded] hit it to leftfield. He wouldn't let us swing for the fences at all.

Cleveland manager Jeff Torborg, who had replaced Robinson two months earlier, moved Kuiper up to the number 2 spot in the batting order against Chicago starter Steve Stone.

**Kuiper** In the first inning it was a 1-0 count. I like to tell Stone that he threw

me a hanging fastball. He doesn't particularly want to hear about it.

Kuiper hit a line drive off a seat in the rightfield stands.

**Frank Robinson** [joking, in 1984] He waited until I got fired to hit his homer. The truth is, he won't hit one for a black manager.

**Kuiper** I've still got the chair. It's in the attic. I've still got the ball and the bat. As I was walking up to the bat rack [for my next at bat], [teammate] Bill Melton said, "You're not gonna use that again, are you?" I said, "Of course." He said, "You might want to put that one away. You might not hit another one."

He didn't. In 1985, Kuiper retired, and he went on to become an Emmy-winning broadcaster for the Giants. His 3,754 plate appearances are the most for any major leaguer with exactly one homer—making his shot off Stone the rarest in history.

**Kuiper** You gotta have fun with it. Given the choice now, would I rather hit one or five? Unless the other four were walk-off grand slams, I'm pretty happy with one. I'm happy with the way it turned out. □



## BREAKOUT PERFORMER

HOT

### Khris Davis

The Brewers' LF has been slugging better than Baltimore's Chris Davis. A rare bright spot in Milwaukee's season, the 25-year-old rookie had eight homers in his first 81 at bats and an OPS of 1.125.

### The Welsh

Cardiff City won its Premier League home debut, over Man City, while Cardiff native Gareth Bale appears ready to jump from Spurs to Real Madrid in a \$100 million-plus transfer.

### Lydia Ko

She shot a 64 to win the Canadian Women's Open for the second time and moved up to No. 7 in the world. Not bad for a 16-year-old.

### Grammar

Bucks C Larry Sanders got a tattoo that included the word *recieve*. Repeat: I before E, except after C...

### Bobby Riggs

This won't help the legacy: *Outside the Lines* reports Riggs threw his Battle of the Sexes match against Billie Jean King to pay off the mob.

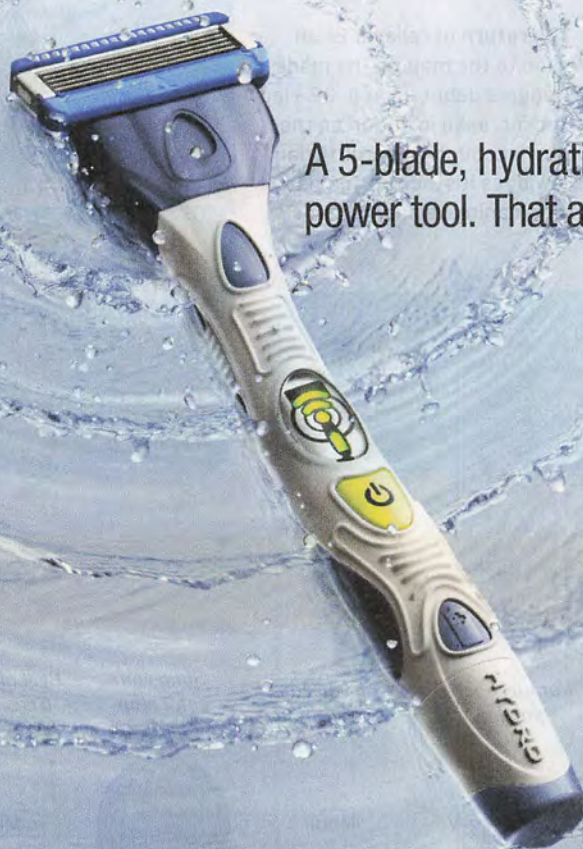
NOT



## SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The coach of Kazakh side Shakhter Karagandy sacrificed a sheep before the team's 2-0 Champions League win over Celtic.





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**PEYTON'S HEAD**

**[@PeytonsHead]**  
The noggin of Broncos QB Peyton Manning has 77,977 followers. **Style:** Prolific, pop-culture-heavy. **Sample:** #VMAs Roger Goodell was so impressed with Justin Timberlake, he's been invited to perform at Super Bowl LXXVIII in 2044. **Rating:** 🐦🐦🐦🐦



**QUENNEVILLE'S STACHE** **[@CoachQsMustache]**

The soup strainer of Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville has 18,093 followers. **Style:** Largely interactive, hirsute. **Sample:** @mikekozec13 I'm sorry, this mustache doesn't speak Latin. **Rating:** 🐦🐦🐦 *[out of four]*

## Unreal Life

*Fake feeds in the Twitterverse*

**The return** of reliever Brian Wilson to the majors—he made his Dodgers debut on Aug. 22—led to an increase in action on the Twitter account @BeardOfBrian. How does it stack up against other inanimate sports feeds?



**LEBRON'S HEADBAND**

**[@Lebrons\_HB]**  
The king's cotton crown has 2,865 followers. **Style:** Dormant [six tweets, none since the Finals]. **Sample:** LeBron scored 16 points without me. Please take me back **Rating:** 🐦🐦



**RAFA'S KNEES**

**[@RafasKnees]**  
The creaky joints of Rafael Nadal have 994 followers. **Style:** Informative. **Sample:** Waiting to find out if I'm injured. Stay tuned. **Rating:** 🐦🐦🐦



**TOM BRADY'S EGO** **[@TomBradysEgo]**

The self-image of the Patriots QB has 24,309 followers. **Style:** Snarky. **Sample:** Looks like Geno Smith watching Mark Sanchez in practice is really starting to pay off. **Rating:** 🐦🐦🐦🐦

## They Said It





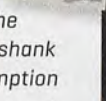


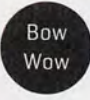
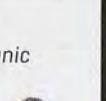
*"I had to Google 'existential crisis.' It was an existential crisis."*



**Jayson Werth**  
*Nationals rightfielder, after being*

frozen by a 57-mph eephus pitch from Carlos Villanueva of the Cubs on Aug. 21. Werth, who had homered on a 94-mph fastball in his previous plate appearance, flew out two pitches later.

## + POP CULTURE GRID ...

What athletes are thinking	Funniest person you know	App you can't live without	Song you can't stop singing	Best nickname a coach ever gave you	First celebrity crush	Movie you watch every time it's on TV
 <b>Serena Williams</b>	Sascha Bajin	Mobli	"Against All Odds" by Phil Collins	Meek	Chris [Mack Daddy] White	 <b>Forrest Gump</b>
 <b>Dax McCarty</b> <i>Red Bulls, M</i>	Stephen Keel	Seamless	"Wake Me Up" by Avicii	None worth mentioning	 <b>Kelly Kapowski</b>	 <b>The Shawshank Redemption</b>
 <b>Tiffany Hayes</b> <i>Atlanta Dream, G</i>	Armintie Herrington	 <b>Instagram</b>	"Fashion Killa" by ASAP Rocky	Silent Assassin	 <b>Bow Wow</b>	 <b>Titanic</b>

+ Bajin is Williams's hitting partner, Herrington is a Dream guard and Keel is a former teammate of McCarty's. "He likes to dumb the soccer language down as literal as you can possibly go," says McCarty. "He always refers to training as 'soccer kicking practice.' For some reason, whenever he says that, it's the funniest."

+ "An AAU coach gave me that," says Hayes, who is averaging 11.6 points, "because I'm being effective even when you don't see it."



**EXTRA MUSTARD ON SI.COM**

TWITTER.COM (13): SIMON BRUYER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (WERTH, WILLIAMS); EVERETT COLLECTION (INSTAGRAM); SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/ALAMY (KELLY); BETTMANN (TITANIC); JORDAN STRAUSS (MCCARTY)





WORDS WITH ...

+

## Hannibal Buress

*The comedian, pickle-juice aficionado (search for it on YouTube) and former SNL writer plays a low-energy hype man in Kevin Durant's new Nike commercial.*

**SPORTS ILLUSTRATED:** *How did the commercial come about? Hannibal Buress: I saw the casting breakdown after one of my friends went and auditioned. It said they were looking for an MC at a Rucker Park-style court, "a late-20s, early-30s, not particularly athletic Hannibal Buress type." I hadn't even gotten a call. I went, What the hell?*

**SI:** *You're about as Hannibal Buress type as they come.*

**HB:** Yeah, so they offered it.

**SI:** *You're a big sports fan. Do you just watch games, or are you following talk radio and the talking-head shows?*

**HB:** I find that even more fascinating than playing a

sport professionally—the idea of talking about a sport professionally [laughs]. And not having to be right. You just have to fill time. I'm just going to argue with you. It's interesting to watch Skip [Bayless] and Stephen A. Smith. It'd be boring if Stephen A. said, "Yeah, this is what I believe in," and Skip is like, "Yeah, me too."

**SI:** *What's your take on A-Rod?*

**HB:** I'm not a huge baseball fan. I appreciate the athleticism and the skill, but I don't want to watch the whole thing. I just want a recap, like on a TV show: "Previously, on baseball ... " Thirty seconds tops.

### SI.COM

For a video Q&A with Hannibal Buress, go to [extramustard.si.com](http://extramustard.si.com)

**SI:** *Another big story now is the Jets' QB situation. Thoughts?*

**HB:** Mark Sanchez signed that extension in the [2012] off-season that should be inspiring to people around the country who are mediocre at their jobs. I don't know if it's inspiring or discouraging: I can't do that at my job and get extended.

**SI:** *What's your best sports memory?*

**HB:** All the championships with the Bulls. But I was just a kid. That last championship was '98, so I was 15. The thing I talk about with friends is wanting to have been around a dynasty and be in the nightlife when the Bulls were killing it. Because I wonder if it would have just been easy to get laid. "Hey, Bulls won again. Wanna. . ."

**SI:** *What was the scouting report on Hannibal the player?*

**HB:** Not a good jump shot. Scrappy, dive for loose balls, good defense. Who would be my NBA equivalent? I don't know. I can't think of too many 5' 10" guys who don't have some kind of ability.

—M.B.



**Dean Meminger**  
1948–2013

→ **The fate** of the urban athlete with promise usually gets depicted as a path with a fork in it—this way, basketball star; that way, casualty of the streets. The life of Dean Meminger, who died of undetermined causes in a Harlem hotel room last Friday at 65, repudiated all such binary tidiness. He was a star, to be sure; no player 6 feet and 175 pounds more thoroughly made New York City's game his, from early exploits on uptown playgrounds to later ones at Madison Square Garden, where as a junior he led Marquette to the 1970 NIT championship, and three years later, as a lockdown, off-the-bench defender for the world-champion Knicks. But he also traced an addiction to cocaine back to idle moments during his playing days.

Meminger had a sound bite Boswell in his college coach, Al McGuire, who once described him as "quicker than 11:15 Mass at a seaside resort." That, along with long arms and a rugged court presence, accounted for Dean the Dream's success more than any ability to shoot well or dribble artfully. He'll always be remembered for an essential contribution to basketball's Bartlett's, the pronouncement [known as Meminger's Law] that "if you don't play ball, you can't hang out." As it happened, the salubrity of playing ball steadily gave way to the depredations of hanging out until, there being no fork in his road, Meminger found himself back in the same patch of Upper Manhattan where he had begun.

—Alexander Wolff



The  
EDGE

TENNIS

+

## Surviving the U.S. Open

It's one of the most grueling fortnights in sports: withering matches in weather that can go from blistering hot to postmonsoon humid to autumn chill in a matter of hours. Here's how 13th-seeded John Isner—who is no stranger to epic tennis, having played an 11-hour match at Wimbledon in 2010—copes **BY ANDREW LAWRENCE**

## SHOULDER

The strength of Isner's game is his serve, which has topped out at 149 mph. "I need to have as much energy as possible in my service games," says Isner, who relies on motion stretching and light weight training to keep his right arm strong. On defense, though, he picks his spots. Kind of. "If I'm up a break in a set, I can just ride out my serve," he says. "That doesn't necessarily mean that I'm tanking the return games, but it gives me the opportunity to conserve energy for the service game, knowing that I have that break in hand."

## CORE

Tennis is not meant for the tall man. Its aerobic and kinesthetic demands, stressful enough for a 6-footer, could nearly break the 6' 10" Isner. He hasn't broken yet because of the work he puts into his core: multi-planar-based stability exercises that are designed to strengthen his abs and lower back. "It's all stability for him," Morgan says. "If you have no core stability, momentum can take your body control away from you."

## DIET

Isner counts meals, not calories. His target is three or four a day, with plenty of energy bars, berries and bananas in between—especially during changeovers. Save for pasta, "there's nothing I don't like," he says. He gets most of his carbs from brown rice and sweet potatoes. The nutrient-rich diet includes a steady dose of meat for protein and supplies Isner with premium fuel. Staying hydrated and keeping the electrolytes flowing limit the potential for cramping—which was once a recurring story line in his matches.

## MIND

The Open is as much a mental game as a physical one. Decompressing off the court is particularly easy for Isner, 28, this time of year, what with football starting back up and all. [The Carolina Panthers and Georgia, his alma mater, are the teams he follows most closely.] Finding peace during a match, however, is tougher to practice. "You can't duplicate adrenaline," says Kyle Morgan, Isner's strength and conditioning coach. "When you release adrenaline and pressure and you're stressed, your heart rate is gonna get higher. We try our best, but we're limited in the situations we can re-create."

## HEART, LUNGS AND LEGS

During the off-season Morgan puts Isner through a formidable circuit [which includes sled pulls, hurdles and a 200-yard dash] with the aim of allowing him to recover quickly from intense play. "A point can be one second long," says Morgan. "We might choose work-to-rest ratios that are going to mimic three games in a row. We'll work for five seconds and be off for 15, work for 20 and be off for 30. It's about getting his body used to working really, really hard at a high level for five seconds, and then resting to get his energy levels back up." Another priority is protecting Isner's knees; a sore left one slowed him for a stretch this summer. A prematch stretching routine that focuses on his glutes helps activate the muscles around the knee to better guard against injury.





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## SCORECARD



**Gunnar Bentz** | *Atlanta* | *Swimming*

Gunnar, a St. Pius X Catholic senior, won four titles at junior nationals in Irvine, Calif., setting meet records in the 200-meter breast [2:12.88] and the 400 IM [4:14.51]. He also won the 200 free and helped his swim club set a national 17-to-18 age-group mark in the 4×200 free relay [7:30.87].



**Simone Biles** | *Spring, Texas* | *Gymnastics*

Simone, a homeschooled junior, won the senior all-around national title in Hartford. She took silver in all four events for 120,450 points, beating Olympic gold medalist Kyla Ross by .2. Last March, Simone was second in the American Cup in Greensboro, N.C., and won the City of Jesolo Trophy meet in Italy.



**Grant Sherman** | *Kenton, Ohio* | *Football*

Grant, a senior quarterback at Kenton High, led the Wildcats to 12 wins in 13 games at the National Select 7-on-7 championship in Hoover, Ala., including a 22-5 win over Byrnes [S.C.] High. During the 2012 season he set an Ohio single-game passing record with 684 yards.

# Faces in the Crowd

→ | Edited By **ALEXANDRA FENWICK**



**Leahi Camacho** | *Kailua-Kona, Hawaii* | *Swimming*

Leahi, a Kealahou High senior, became the youngest, at 17, to swim the 26-mile Kaiwi Channel, between the Hawaiian islands of Molokai and Oahu. She completed the open-ocean swim in 14 hours, 43 minutes, despite seven-foot swells and being stung halfway through by a Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish.



**Jeff Evans** | *Cedar City, Utah* | *Golf*

Evans, 23, a Southern Utah School of Business student, shot a course-record 62 at a Utah Section PGA Pro-Am at Palisade Golf Course in Sterling with a 10-under 26 on the back nine that included six birdies and two eagles. It is thought to be the second-lowest nine-hole score ever in competitive golf.



**Emily Cavacini and Cooper Fisher**  
*Shaler, Pa.; Middletown, Md.* | *Marbles*

Emily, 11, and Cooper, 12, won the girls' and boys' division titles at the National Marbles Tournament in Wildwood, N.J. They both beat out a field of 25 in the four-day event and won their finals 8-6.

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VIAGRA is prescription medication to treat erectile dysfunction (ED).

### IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION BELOW.

Do not take VIAGRA if you take nitrates, often prescribed for chest pain, as this may cause a sudden, unsafe drop in blood pressure.

Discuss your general health status with your doctor to ensure that you are healthy enough to engage in sexual activity. If you experience chest pain, nausea, or any other discomforts during sex, seek immediate medical help.

In the rare event of an erection lasting more than 4 hours, seek immediate medical help to avoid long-term injury.

If you are older than age 65, or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg) of VIAGRA. If you are taking protease inhibitors, such as for the treatment of HIV, your doctor may recommend a 25-mg dose and may limit you to a maximum single dose of 25 mg of VIAGRA in a 48-hour period. If you have prostate problems or high blood pressure for which you take medicines called alpha blockers, your doctor may start you on a lower dose of VIAGRA.

In rare instances, men taking PDE5 inhibitors (oral erectile dysfunction medicines, including VIAGRA) reported a sudden decrease or loss of vision or hearing. If you experience sudden decrease or loss of vision or hearing, stop taking PDE5 inhibitors, including VIAGRA, and call a doctor right away.

VIAGRA should not be used with other ED treatments. VIAGRA should not be used with REVATIO or other products containing sildenafil.

VIAGRA does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. Less commonly, bluish vision, blurred vision, or sensitivity to light may briefly occur.

Please see Important Facts for VIAGRA on the following page or visit [viagra.com](http://viagra.com) for full prescribing information.

*You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit [www.FDA.gov/medwatch](http://www.FDA.gov/medwatch) or call 1-800-FDA-1088.*

The blue diamond tablet shape is a registered trademark of Pfizer Inc.

 **VIAGRA**<sup>®</sup>  
(*sildenafil citrate*) tablets



## IMPORTANT FACTS



**VIAGRA®**  
(sildenafil citrate) tablets

(vi-AG-rah)

### IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION ABOUT VIAGRA

Never take VIAGRA if you take any medicines with nitrates. This includes nitroglycerin. Your blood pressure could drop quickly. It could fall to an unsafe or life-threatening level.

### ABOUT ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED)

Erectile dysfunction means a man cannot get or keep an erection. Health problems, injury, or side effects of drugs may cause ED. The cause may not be known.

### ABOUT VIAGRA

VIAGRA is used to treat ED in men. When you want to have sex, VIAGRA can help you get and keep an erection when you are sexually excited. You cannot get an erection just by taking the pill. Only your doctor can prescribe VIAGRA.

VIAGRA does not cure ED.

VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) or HIV. You will need to use a condom.

VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

### WHO IS VIAGRA FOR?

Who should take VIAGRA?

Men who have ED and whose heart is healthy enough for sex.

Who should NOT take VIAGRA?

- If you ever take medicines with nitrates:
  - Medicines that treat chest pain (angina), such as nitroglycerin or isosorbide mononitrate or dinitrate
- If you use some street drugs, such as “poppers” (amyl nitrate or nitrite)
- If you are allergic to anything in the VIAGRA tablet

### BEFORE YOU START VIAGRA

**Tell your doctor if you have or ever had:**

- Heart attack, abnormal heartbeats, or stroke
- Heart problems, such as heart failure, chest pain, angina, or aortic valve narrowing
- Low or high blood pressure
- Severe vision loss
- An eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa
- Kidney or liver problems
- Blood problems, such as sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- A deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- Stomach ulcers or any kind of bleeding problems

**Tell your doctor about all your medicines.** Include over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal products. Tell your doctor if you take or use:

- Medicines called alpha-blockers to treat high blood pressure or prostate problems. Your blood pressure could suddenly get too low. You could get dizzy or faint. Your doctor may start you on a lower dose of VIAGRA.
- Medicines called protease inhibitors for HIV. Your doctor may prescribe a 25 mg dose. Your doctor may limit VIAGRA to 25 mg in a 48-hour period.
- Other methods to cause erections. These include pills, injections, implants, or pumps.
- A medicine called REVATIO. VIAGRA should not be used with REVATIO as REVATIO contains sildenafil, the same medicine found in VIAGRA.

### POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF VIAGRA

Side effects are mostly mild to moderate. They usually go away after a few hours. Some of these are more likely to happen with higher doses.

**The most common side effects are:**

- Headache
- Feeling flushed
- Upset stomach

**Less common side effects are:**

- Trouble telling blue and green apart or seeing a blue tinge on things
- Eyes being more sensitive to light
- Blurred vision

**Rarely, a small number of men taking VIAGRA have reported these serious events:**

- Having an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If the erection is not treated right away, long-term loss of potency could occur.
- Sudden decrease or loss of sight in one or both eyes. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. They may be caused by conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes. If you have sudden vision changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Sudden decrease or loss of hearing. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. If you have sudden hearing changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Heart attack, stroke, irregular heartbeats, and death. We do not know whether these events are caused by VIAGRA or caused by other factors. Most of these happened in men who already had heart problems.

If you have any of these problems, stop VIAGRA. Call your doctor right away.

### HOW TO TAKE VIAGRA

**Do:**

- Take VIAGRA only the way your doctor tells you. VIAGRA comes in 25 mg, 50 mg, and 100 mg tablets. Your doctor will tell you how much to take.
- If you are over 65 or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg).
- Take VIAGRA about 1 hour before you want to have sex. VIAGRA starts to work in about 30 minutes when you are sexually excited. VIAGRA lasts up to 4 hours.

**Don't:**

- Do not take VIAGRA more than once a day.
- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor tells you. If you think you need more VIAGRA, talk with your doctor.
- Do not start or stop any other medicines before checking with your doctor.

### NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- This is only a summary of important information. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for complete product information OR
- Go to [www.viagra.com](http://www.viagra.com) or call (888) 4-VIAGRA (484-2472).



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## J.J. WATT VERTICAL THREAT

The Texans' defensive end, who did a 59½-inch box jump in a video that went viral this July, enters this season with huge expectations after racking up 20½ sacks and NFL Defensive Player of the Year honors in 2012.



## Just My Type

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

**DAN PATRICK:** Are you an entertainer in addition to being a player?

**J.J. WATT:** Pregame there's a lot of that. And after you make a big play. But you have to make the plays or nobody is entertained.

**DP:** Who's the person in your life who will tell you no?

**JJW:** My family and my friends. My best friend from high school. And then my teammates. You go through celebrations and they'll give you a yes or no. I definitely don't have all yes men in my life. That would be a bad way to go.

**DP:** Does your dad still yell at you?

**JJW:** Oh, yeah. I don't think that will ever change.

**DP:** What if I had told you five years ago you would be Defensive Player of the Year?

**JJW:** I would have said that would be awesome and that would mean all the work I put in was worth it. There've been a lot of things that I've given up

and it'd be nice to know it wasn't for nothing.

**DP:** Why'd you put out the jumping video?

**JJW:** I love doing stuff like that. I love doing things that people don't think you should be able to do. Just a little reminder that I work hard in the off-season.

**DP:** How high is your vertical?

**JJW:** At the combine it was 37.

**DP:** Could you win an NFL slam dunk contest?

**JJW:** Probably not. I can't do it through the legs. Somebody in the league could and that would win.

**DP:** If all goes well, what's a reasonable total for how many sacks you'll have this year?

**JJW:** I can't do that. I don't give out the ultimate goals. I do have a goal list, and it's a big number.

**DP:** Over or under 30?

**JJW:** Under. Thirty? I don't know if we're going to see that for a while.

**DP:** Is it getting tougher to know where to hit a QB?

**JJW:** The window is getting smaller and smaller. You can't go for the head or the legs. You have to aim directly for the belt buckle. But if you hit him in the chest and he ducks his head, you get fined. You just have to go out and play your game.

**DP:** How many offensive plays will you be in this season?

**JJW:** My guess is zero.

**DP:** Do you still lobby for that?

**JJW:** I've been lobbying since the day I got to the Texans, and it hasn't worked yet. I would be all for it, but I'm not holding my breath.

**DP:** Could you be an All-Pro tight end?

**JJW:** If I had the training and I put in all the film and put in as much effort as I do for defensive end, I think I'd be a pretty darn good tight end. □

## Guest Shots SAY WHAT?



Vikings running back

**Adrian**

**Peterson** told me he's unfazed by rumors that he took PEDs. "For my name to come up doesn't surprise me at all," Peterson said. "Especially the way I bounced back from injury. But it doesn't



bother me. It's an honor." ... Rays

manager **Joe Maddon** acknowledged that while you can statistically compare Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw with Sandy Koufax, the two lefties are very different. "Kershaw's got a little funk in his delivery," Maddon said. "It's not the fluid motion Koufax had. He's got this little thing that makes him hard to pick up."

... **Jimmie Johnson**



believes NASCAR is safer than the

NFL. "We have a lot more foam inside our helmets," Johnson told me. "The contact our heads make are with other big pieces of foam [inside the car]. We're not making forceful contact with something coming from a different direction. Concussions are far less of an issue."



# BIG MAN ON CAMPUS

From intramural soccer to Econ to Saturday tailgates, your semester is action-packed.

This guide has the essentials for any situation.

## 6. | SATURDAY, 9:33 AM



### FUSION PROGLIDE MANUAL RAZOR

Mom and Dad are in town for this week's football game, and you want to prove you've got it all together this semester. Look sharp with the Fusion ProGlide. Its fine blades offer a clean, comfortable shave, even for sensitive skin.

## 5. | FRIDAY, 10:05 PM

### SCOPE OUTLAST LASTING MOUTHWASH

An off-campus party with your soccer teammates means a lot of new folks to meet. Give a good first impression with Scope Outlast Lasting Mint mouthwash, to fight bad breath on contact and make you the life of the party.



## 4. | THURSDAY, 8:37 AM

### CREST COMPLETE+SCOPE OUTLAST TOOTHPASTE

A daunting day awaits: three morning classes, lunch on the go and an afternoon study session with—yes!—that girl from down the hall. It's a marathon, not a sprint, and Crest Complete+Scope Outlast will keep your breath fresh five times longer.



## 1

## 1. | MONDAY, 7:52 AM

### OLD SPICE SWAGGER DEODORANT INVISIBLE SOLID

Rushing to your 8 o'clock lecture? Old Spice Swagger deodorant gives you the scent of confidence to handle any pop quiz, no matter how challenging the material.



## 2

## 2. | TUESDAY, 3:45 PM

### OLD SPICE SWAGGER BODY WASH

While you're at the gym, you spot that cute girl who lives down the hall—which inspires you to add 20 minutes to your workout. No worries: Old Spice Swagger body wash has eight-hour scent technology, so you'll smell fresh when you run into her later at the library.



## 3

## 3. | WEDNESDAY, 11:15 AM

### HEAD & SHOULDERS/OLD SPICE SHAMPOO AND CONDITIONER

Head & Shoulders/Old Spice shampoo and conditioner gives you dandruff control and great-smelling hair. It's the perfect way to leave a lasting impression as you knock 'em dead at your off-campus internship interview.





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NFL  
PREVIEW  
2013

YOU HAVE  
OPPORTUNITY





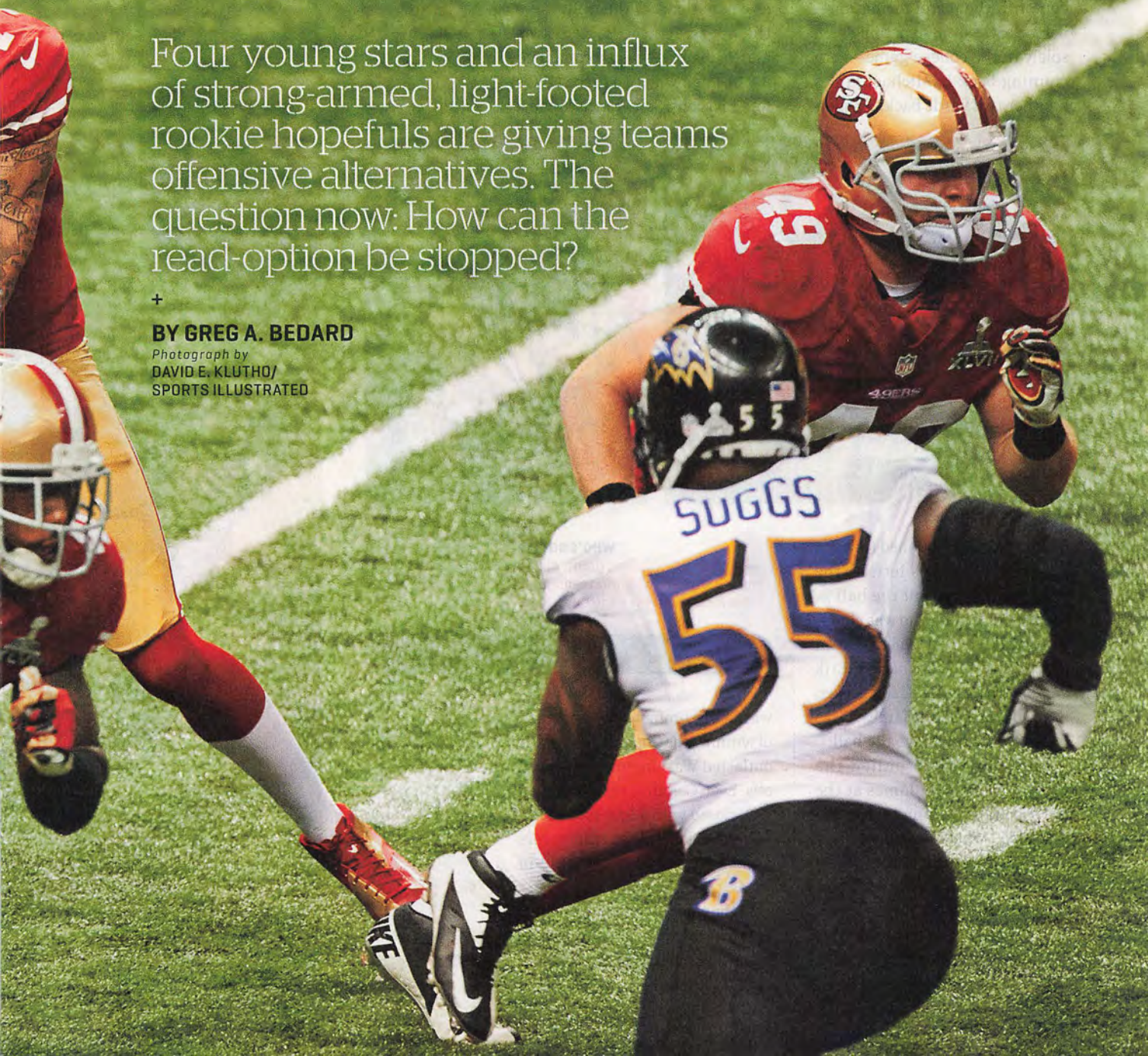
# AVE TIONS

Four young stars and an influx of strong-armed, light-footed rookie hopefuls are giving teams offensive alternatives. The question now: How can the read-option be stopped?

+

**BY GREG A. BEDARD**

Photograph by  
DAVID E. KLUTHO/  
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED







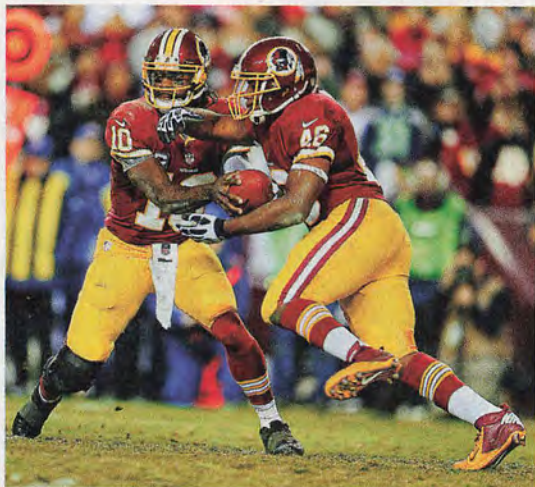
WITH 7:16 left in the third quarter of an NFC divisional playoff at rickety Candlestick

Park last January, the game was up for grabs. The Packers and the 49ers had traded body blows all day, and they were tied at 24 when San Francisco broke the huddle for a second-and-four at their own 44.

Quarterback Colin Kaepernick lined up four yards behind the center in the pistol formation—before last season, something seen solely in the college game—with running back LaMichael James another two yards back. Kaeper-

They were on their way to the NFC championship, and the NFL was staring at an offensive revolution.

**T**HANKS TO AN influx of young QBs who run as well as they throw and bright, daring offensive coordinators eager to innovate and surprise, the read-option took the NFL by storm in 2012. The four teams that ran it as a major part of their offense—the 49ers, Panthers, Redskins and Seahawks—went a combined 39-24-1 and won two of the NFC's four divisions. San Francisco came



nick eventually motioned fullback Bruce Miller to his left. At the snap Kaepernick put the ball in the belly of James, who was charging straight toward the line. Green Bay's left outside linebacker, Erik Walden, and left inside linebacker, Brad Jones, charged James.

Only, he didn't have the ball.

Kaepernick had pulled the pigskin away from James at the last second and scampered to the right side—where Walden had just been. Turning the corner, Kaepernick saw nothing but open field. He galloped 60 yards—in 6.56 seconds—for a touchdown.

The 49ers went on to win 45-31.

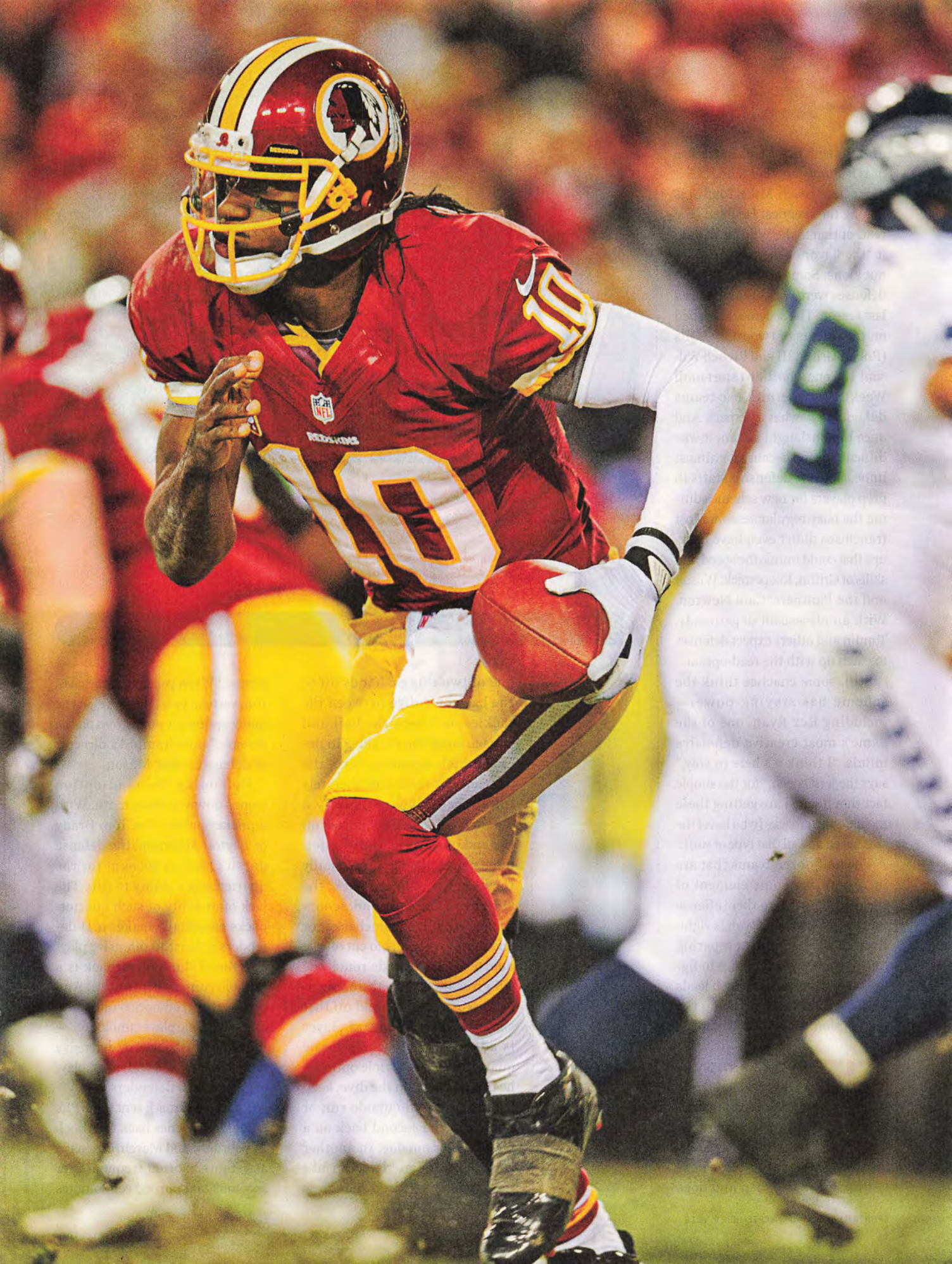
#### WHO'S GOT IT?

The QB-RB crossing point, called the mesh, allows Griffin to disguise his intent and take the open lane.

within a last-minute goal line stand of winning the Super Bowl; Seattle outlasted Washington in the playoffs. Even Carolina, which finished 7-9, closed with a four-game winning streak. All four teams were among the league's top nine in yards gained per play.

In the wake of that success, there are two questions about the read-option. The first: Does it represent







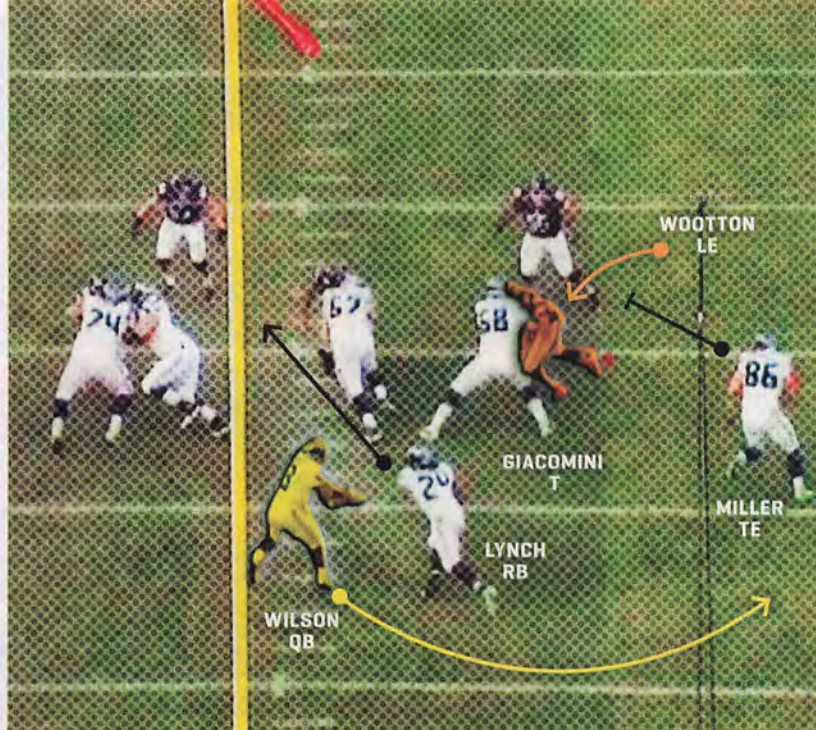
a lasting shift in the NFL landscape or is it simply another fad?

Steelers coach Mike Tomlin is among the skeptics: He likens the read-option to the Wildcat, calling it “the flavor of the month.” He’s not alone. Some coaches feel that defenses were caught unprepared last season. The scheme flourished on the talents of two rookie QBs (Robert Griffin III and Russell Wilson) and one who didn’t start until Week 11 (Kaepernick), so teams did not know what to expect. And once the onslaught began, it was difficult to stop because it’s almost impossible for defensive staffs to prep players for new schemes during the busy regular season. Most franchises didn’t even have backups that could mimic the speed and skills of Griffin, Kaepernick, Wilson and the Panthers’ Cam Newton. With an off-season to get ready, Tomlin and others expect defenses to catch up with the read-option.

Still, some coaches think the scheme has staying power—including Rex Ryan, one of the game’s most creative defensive minds. “I think it’s here to stay,” says the Jets’ coach, “for the simple fact that [teams] are getting these mobile quarterbacks [who have] the size, speed and all that type of stuff.”

The half-dozen teams that are incorporating some element of the read-option into their offense for this season hope Ryan is right. Even those that aren’t preparing to run it have been trying to figure out how it works. Which leads to the second question about the read-option: How do you stop it?

**T**HE READ-OPTION revolves around one basic play, in which the quarterback, usually in the shotgun with a running back next to him, takes the snap and does



**BEAR TRAP** In Seattle’s 23-17 overtime win over the Bears in Week 13, Wilson ran for 71 yards, including 11 on the play above, which started when Chicago left end Corey Wootton pinched inside in pursuit of Marshawn Lynch. Wootton then crashed into Seattle tackle Breno Giacomini. Wilson read the pursuit and chose to keep the ball, and—with an assist from Zach Miller [86], who slacked off the trapped Wootton—he ran around right end for a big gain.

one of two things: hands off to the back on a dive between the tackles, or keeps the ball and runs around the outside. To decide which action to take, the quarterback *reads* a deliberately unblocked player—usually a defensive end or linebacker on the end of the line. If the unfettered player pinches horizontally to chase the running back, the QB keeps the ball and scoots around him. If the linebacker or end moves vertically to cut off the quarterback’s outside route, the QB gives the ball to the back.

The complexities build off that signature play. If a third player is added to the backfield, the quarterback has a triple option—he can hand off on the dive, keep it himself on an outside run or pitch it to the second back on a path farther outside. In another variation the quarterback can fake the handoff, then drop and throw

a pass. “When you look at the pass, run, vertical pass, there are just so many options, it puts stress on the defense,” says Stanford’s director of defense, Derek Mason.

Defending the read-option comes down to basic math. With a pocket passer like Tom Brady or Peyton Manning, the defense doesn’t have to account for the quarterback’s ability to run. The lack of mobility of such quarterbacks essentially makes it 11 defenders against 10 offensive players. But if the quarterback is a capable runner, it’s 11 on 11. And because the read-option intentionally leaves one player unblocked—that edge linebacker or defensive end—it’s actually 11 offensive players against 10 defenders.

That sort of math sent the NFL’s defensive coaches back to school. In February and March, dozens of assistants boosted frequent-flier accounts and burned cell minutes



**“When you look at the pass, run, vertical pass, there are just so many options, it puts stress on the defense,” says Stanford’s director of defense, Derek Mason.**

### QB KEEP



If the DE/LB pinches...

...the QB opts to keep the ball

### DIVE



If the DE/LB moves up the field...

...the QB hands off to the RB

### PITCH



If the safety fills the outside lane...

...the QB pitches to a flanker or RB

consulting with college coaches who regularly deal with the read-option. It's not as if NFL coaches had never seen it before: Virtually all of them played or coached in high school, where similar offensive systems—the option, veer and double wing—are staples. But for most a refresher course was in order.

Cowboys coach Jason Garrett consulted with former colleague Paul Pasqualoni, now UConn's coach. Alabama's Nick Saban heard from all his old NFL buddies. Stanford's Mason talked with a half-dozen teams, including a

few that told him to keep the visits quiet. The Falcons' coaches, who were victimized by the read-option in their NFC Championship Game loss to the 49ers, paid a visit to Clemson co-defensive coordinator Marion Hobby, a Saints assistant from 2006 to '07. Packers defensive coordinator Dom Capers and his staff visited Texas A&M coach Kevin Sumlin, who's considered an offensive guru. Capers and his staff picked Sumlin's brain about which defensive strategies gave him trouble and which ones he was thrilled to see.

The takeaway from all these meetings and phone calls? Defenses basically have two choices against the read-option: speed up or slow down.

**S**TANFORD'S MASON, a former Vikings assistant, leads the slow movement. He preaches that the unblocked player should put doubt in the quarterback's head by starting up the field slowly and then reacting to the dive. "If you come up the field and then try to squeeze [down toward the running back], it doesn't give [the quarterback] a fast read," says Mason, scribbling furiously on the whiteboard in his office. "Don't give a fast read, give a slow read."

If the uncertainty of a slow read causes even a moment of hesitation for the quarterback, it can swing the advantage back to the defense.

To illustrate the point, Mason flips on the film of last season's

Stanford-Oregon game, a 17-14 Cardinal victory against the No. 1 Ducks, who had been averaging 54.3 points a game. Facing second-and-12 from the Stanford 27-yard line on the second play of overtime, Oregon quarterback Marcus Mariota is in the shotgun with running back Kenjon Barner behind him. As the play begins, Mariota pivots to his right and stares at Trent Murphy, Stanford's senior outside linebacker. Murphy does just as Mason has instructed. Murphy takes two hard steps forward and freezes, putting doubt in Mariota's mind.

The blocking is there for the handoff to Barner, but the slow read causes Mariota to misjudge. He keeps the ball and Murphy chases Mariota wide, stopping him after a three-yard gain. On the next play, third-and-long, Oregon fails to convert and then misses a field goal, setting the stage for Stanford's upset.

The other option is to attack the quarterback: The unblocked player charges him, forcing the QB to make a quick decision—hopefully the wrong one. "A lot of times you want to speed up the quarterback on his read," says Clemson's Hobby. "It allows the defense to dictate what goes on up front."

If the quarterback keeps the ball, he gets crushed; if he hands it off, a fast-closing defender will often arrive just after the exchange, in time to deliver a legal blow to the quarterback. Those hits add up over the course of a game and a season. "The more you

The M M Q B

Want even more NFL info? Make sure to check out Andy Benoit's Deep Dive analysis of all 32 teams at [TheMMQB.com](http://TheMMQB.com)



## Steelers coach Mike Tomlin likens the read-option to the Wildcat, calling it “the flavor of the month.”



put your quarterback in harm’s way,” says Cardinals coach Bruce Arians, “the more harm is going to come to your quarterback.”

In the speed-up scenario the unblocked defender’s only job is to ignore the running back and stick with the QB. Someone else is responsible for the running back. This is known as assignment football: Everybody has a duty, and if each performs it well, all options should be covered. The Ravens, with two weeks to prepare for the Super Bowl, used that tactic against the 49ers and kept Kaepernick bottled up until the second half.

Assignment football has been the preferred reaction to the spread option in the NFL. The Patriots used it in 2011 when they faced Tim Tebow and the Broncos in the regular season and the playoffs. In the first game the Patriots allowed 167 rushing yards in the first quarter and trailed 16–7 early in the second. Then New England settled into its assignments and outscored Denver 79–17 in the

next five-plus quarters of action.

“Personally, when everybody has their own assignments, and I have a green light to go hit the quarterback, I enjoy that,” says Patriots linebacker Rob Ninkovich, who keyed the defensive approach against Tebow. “The problem with that comes when guys are doing more than one thing—dive and quarterback at the same time, and then get to the pitch? It doesn’t work. Everyone has to be on the same page. That’s what stops those plays.”

That’s a good plan against a quarterback like Tebow, who is less of a passing threat, but the QBs who emerged last season can throw as well as they run.

“The play action is just as tough as the zone read,” says Hobby. “It freezes the linebackers. And then [if] the quarterback has a strong arm, boy, he’s hitting those quick slants and digs right behind you, and then the deep ball. It takes a special, talented quarterback to play that offense. Those four guys are special.”

### THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

Stanford’s shutdown of Oregon last fall drove NFL coaches to Palo Alto in search of solutions.

**T**O MAKE assignment football work, the defense has to cheat by bringing an extra player closer to the line of scrimmage—usually a safety who patrols the otherwise uncovered alley between the tight end and the wide receiver. It’s effective, but it takes a player out of the defensive backfield, making the D more susceptible to the pass. An accurate quarterback has a distinct advantage.

That’s what happened to the Patriots last season against the 49ers. New England dared Kaepernick to beat them with his arm. Sure enough, all five of San Francisco’s biggest offensive plays in its 41–34 win came on passes:

- Kaepernick to Michael Crabtree, 38-yard game-winning TD.



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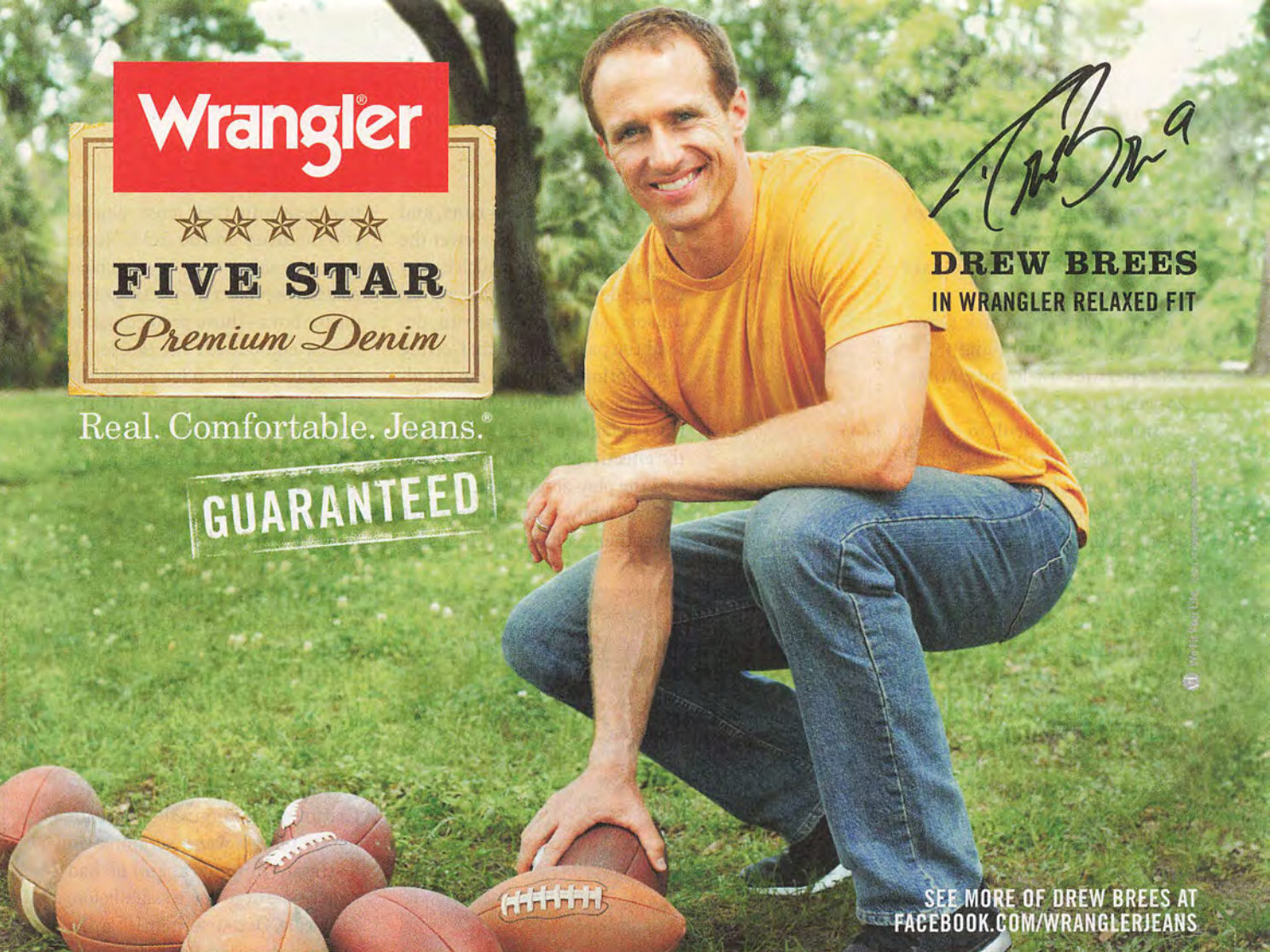
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- Kaepernick to Delanie Walker, 34-yard touchdown.
- Kaepernick to Crabtree, 27-yard touchdown.
- Kaepernick to Frank Gore, 26-yard gain on third-and-15.
- Kaepernick to Randy Moss, 24-yard touchdown.

"It makes it difficult to defend when you're able to pull the ball back off one of these fakes and there's a receiver who's 20 yards open," Saints coach Sean Payton says. "We're not used to seeing that in our game."

One counter is to play man-to-man on the receivers. But man coverage requires the defender to watch the receiver and not the quarterback, so when a mobile passer decides to scramble, he can be 20 yards downfield before half the defense even realizes it. In their playoff loss to the 49ers, the Packers were victimized by those types of scrambles more than by the read-option itself.

To combat the problem, Capers says, "you can [play] zone and keep all the defensive backs with vision on the quarterback, or you've got to do a better job with your rush up front."

The league's top pass rushers, many of whom are used to firing off the ball, are being retrained: They will have to play standing up and react to what they're seeing in front of them. That's a difficult transition for a veteran who in the past has been worried only about hunting quarterbacks on passing downs.

"You can't run up the field to get the quarterback," said Bengals coach Marvin Lewis, a defensive coordinator for seven seasons. "For some of these guys getting paid \$10 million to rush the quarterback, that's a change. They're not used to doing that."

Still, passes are lower-

percentage plays than runs, and the longer the pass, the lower the odds of connecting—which is why college defenses have taken what Mason calls a "stop the run, defend the pass" approach. Getting read-option offenses into third-and-long situations creates a distinct defensive edge by reducing the effectiveness of the option run and the play-action fake.

Says Hobby, "You definitely have to get them behind the chains."



#### BUILT TO LAST

Wear and tear can be a problem for read-option QBs, but the 6' 5", 245-pound Newton [1] can take it.

A CORE GROUP of NFL coaches—including Tomlin, Arians, Tom Coughlin (Giants), Payton and Lions defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham—believes the read-option will be phased out because of the injury potential for quarterbacks. There's sound thinking behind that theory. Many of the QBs in question are or soon will be the best-paid players on their teams. They are often the faces of the franchise, and the owners who

pay them want their most valuable commodities on the field. Never mind the safety rules owners have enacted to protect the pocket-passer poster boys—those protections do not extend outside the tackles. If the players who have made the read-option a hit start to fall, the QB running game will be curtailed.

It's true that the more times a quarterback carries the ball, the greater the chances he'll be hit and injured, but it's a mistake to pin injuries on the read-option. For starters, the decision the quarterback makes is designed to take him out of harm's way.

The Redskins' 2012 season was stunted when Griffin suffered a knee injury against the Ravens in Week 14 and aggravated it in the playoff loss to the Seahawks. But Griffin wasn't injured on a read-option play; it was a scramble on a straight drop-back, and he had ample time to go down safely before the tackle. Of course, injuries strike pocket passers like Brady and Manning too. And in the NFL nobody uses the read-option full time. "[The 49ers] aren't running Kaepernick an inordinate amount of times," Mason says. "I don't see [the read-option] going away anytime soon, but you're not going to see it 25 times a game."

Maybe we'll see it even less than that because the read-option has lost its surprise factor. Defensive coordinators have done their research, studied the film and spent an entire training camp drilling their players on the theories and techniques.

At the same time, offensive coordinators such as Greg Roman (49ers) and Kyle Shanahan (Redskins) have had an off-season to implement tweaks and variations designed to keep them one step ahead. The stage is set. The field is even. The proving ground for the read-option in the NFL is upon us. □



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NFL PREVIEW 2013

# PASS IT FORWARD

Four young quarterbacks took the league by storm in 2012, but how quickly—and how high—will they rise? SI compared each with a Super Bowl champion, showing ways in which the past could be prologue

Photograph by AL TIELEMANS FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Like Elway (near right) in his prime with the Broncos, Griffin can make a big play with his legs or throw a downfield strike with precision.





## + WHY RG3 = JOHN ELWAY

### When You're Born to Run, It Doesn't Mean You Can't Be the Gunslinger

→ "IF YOU'VE got a guy who's got the talented arm and he can make off-scheduled plays—that gives you a chance to win Super Bowls," Redskins coach Mike Shanahan says. He's not just referring to John Elway, with whom he won a pair of Lombardi Trophies in Denver. He's also talking about Robert Griffin III, with whom he hopes to win more in Washington.

Griffin's speed—he ran a 4.38 in the 40-yard dash at the 2012 NFL combine—makes him unique among quarterbacks, but he is more than a runner just as Elway was more than a passer. "I don't think there is any question that both of these guys are outstanding athletes, and with that comes not only the ability to throw the football but the versatility they give your offense," says Dan Reeves, the Broncos' coach for the first decade of Elway's career.

Shanahan won titles with

Elway and—as the 49ers' offensive coordinator—the similarly mobile Steve Young, experiences that sold him on Griffin's value. Elway never rushed for 815 yards in a season, as Griffin did as a rookie, nor was he the triggerman on the zone-read-option plays that were a significant part of Washington's offense in 2012. But early in his 16-year NFL career "my athleticism is kind of what carried me," says Elway, 53, who is now executive vice president of the Broncos. (His career high for rushing yards was 304, in 1987.) Denver did use quarterback draws and scramble sets, putting pressure on the defense by releasing Elway outside the pocket. From there he could either tuck the ball and run or buy time for a receiver to get open.

Elway's greatest skills were creating with his legs and throwing deep. In Griffin, Reeves has observed the same ability to scramble, keep an eye downfield and connect on a big pass play.

As the Redskins' QB continues to develop, chasing the vast expectations he quickly created, he may resemble Elway in another way—one that became obvious after Griffin's reconstructive right-knee surgery last January. Elway eventually came to rely more on his arm than on his legs as his ability to read defenses and anticipate throws increased and age rendered his body less able to rebound from hits. "That's going to be one of the key things with RG3: Is he going to be able to make that transition?" Reeves says. "He's fortunate to have a coach that's had that experience."

—Jenny Vrentas





## + WHY ANDREW LUCK = PEYTON MANNING

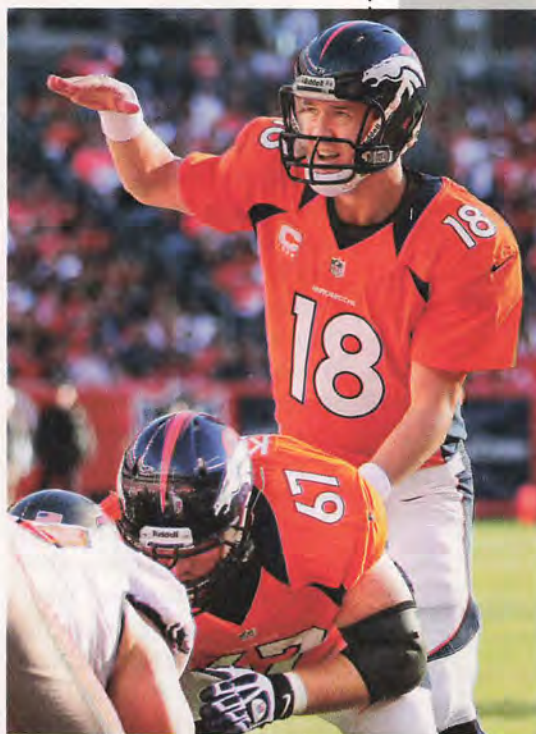
### When You Lose a Legend, It Doesn't Mean You're Out of Luck

→ TENSE. That's how the older members of the Colts remember practices in the Peyton Manning era, especially on Fridays. Manning fostered tension—thrived on it. It was an approach to the game that he'd brought from the University of Tennessee. Former Volunteers and later Ravens running back Jamal Lewis remembers dreading the moment he'd drop a practice pass from the 21-year-old Manning. "When you got back into the huddle, you didn't even want to look him in the eye," Lewis says. "He'd give you this ugly, cockeyed look. Everybody who's played with him has seen it."

Manning used that look in Indianapolis with well-documented success, rising to MVP of Super Bowl XLI. But with injury and age weighing on him, he was released after the 2011 season, making way for the top pick of the '12 draft, Andrew Luck. The rookie threw for 4,374 yards and led the Colts to an improbable postseason berth, inevitably drawing comparisons to his predecessor. Luck has the arm strength that Manning, now the Broncos' QB, once boasted, and the same obsession with preparation. But there's one way in which he's very different.

"In practice he has fun," says Colts wide receiver Reggie Wayne, who gained 10,602 of his 13,063 career receiving yards on passes from Manning's right hand. "He's like a big kid out there playing Pee Wee football."

The dog days are dogged no more in Anderson, Ind., site of the Colts' training camp. There's



While Manning (above) and Luck share the same obsession with preparation, the Colts' QB allows himself to have fun in practice.

time and tolerance for celebratory water-bottle showers among the defensive linemen and for prolonged postplay wrestling for ball possession among receivers and defensive backs. If a receiver fails to sprint downfield after a completion—or, worse, drops a pass—Luck shrugs it off and moves on. Manning would have remonstrated. That's not a habit Luck is likely to develop as he gains experience and confidence.

"It's just not Andrew's style, not his personality," says Colts safety Antoine Bethea, another holdover from the Manning era. "He's intense in a different way."

Luck doesn't like to compare

himself to Manning; he seems embarrassed (though "tremendously honored," he says) to be likened to an NFL great only one season into his pro career. "Peyton set the bar for being a quarterback," Luck says, "and certainly for being a quarterback in this town. But I do not live in Peyton Manning's world. I feel like the media has made me out to be more like him than I really am."

Personality differences aside, the weight on their respective shoulders has hardly been the same. The Colts under team president and vice chairman Bill Polian had a bend-don't-break defense, putting a huge burden on Manning as he carried the offense. Under second-year G.M. Ryan Grigson, defensive upgrades have balanced the responsibility, and there's no expectation for Luck to be someone he isn't. That's more than O.K. with him.

"One of the good things about being here," he says, "is I don't feel I'm being held to some Peyton Manning standard. I'm just trying to be me." —Robert Klemko



RICH GABRIELSON/ICON SM (MANNING); ANDREW HANCOCK FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (LUCK)



For patients 12 years and older whose asthma is not well controlled on a long-term asthma medicine or whose disease severity warrants.

## IF YOU THINK ASTHMA 'COMES AND GOES' THINK AGAIN.

IT'S MISUNDERSTOOD. ASTHMA DOESN'T COME AND GO. Inflammation, the root cause of asthma is always there, making your lungs more vulnerable to triggers. So, while it's important to avoid triggers, it's also important to treat this inflammation. SYMBICORT helps reduce the underlying inflammation. SYMBICORT helps keep airways open and improve lung function for better breathing all day and night.\* SYMBICORT does not replace a rescue inhaler for sudden symptoms. Once your asthma is well controlled, your doctor will decide if you can stop taking SYMBICORT without loss of control and may prescribe a long-term asthma control medicine such as an inhaled corticosteroid.

\* When taken twice daily.

**Ask your doctor about SYMBICORT.**

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT SYMBICORT

#### Important Safety Information About SYMBICORT for Asthma

SYMBICORT contains formoterol, a long-acting beta<sub>2</sub>-adrenergic agonist (LABA). LABA medicines such as formoterol increase the risk of death from asthma problems. It is not known whether budesonide, the other medicine in SYMBICORT, reduces the risk of death from asthma problems seen with formoterol. SYMBICORT should be used only if your health care provider decides that your asthma is not well controlled with a long-term asthma control medicine, such as an inhaled corticosteroid, or that your asthma is severe enough to begin treatment with SYMBICORT.

If you are taking SYMBICORT, see your health care provider if your asthma does not improve or gets worse. It is important that your health care provider assess your asthma control on a regular basis. Your doctor will decide if it is possible for you to stop taking SYMBICORT and start taking a long-term asthma control medicine without loss of asthma control. Children and adolescents who take LABA medicines may have an increased risk of being hospitalized for asthma problems.

SYMBICORT does not replace rescue inhalers for sudden asthma symptoms.

Be sure to tell your health care provider about all your health conditions, including heart conditions or high blood pressure, and all medicines you may be taking. Some patients taking SYMBICORT may experience increased blood pressure, heart rate, or change in heart rhythm.

Do not use SYMBICORT more often than prescribed. While taking SYMBICORT, never use another medicine containing a LABA for any reason. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist if any of your other medicines are LABA medicines, as using too much LABA may cause chest pain, increase in blood pressure, fast and irregular heartbeat, headache, tremor, and nervousness.

Patients taking SYMBICORT should call their health care provider or get emergency medical care:

- if you experience serious allergic reactions including rash, hives, swelling of the face, mouth and tongue, and breathing problems.
- if you think you are exposed to infections such as chicken pox or measles, or if you have any signs of infection. You may have a higher chance of infection.
- if you experience an increase in wheezing right after taking SYMBICORT, eye problems including glaucoma and cataracts, decreases in bone mineral density, swelling of blood vessels (signs include a feeling of pins and needles or numbness of arms or legs, flu like symptoms, rash, pain and swelling of the sinuses), decrease in blood potassium and increase in blood sugar levels.

If you are switching to SYMBICORT from an oral corticosteroid, follow your health care provider's instructions to avoid serious health risks when you stop using oral corticosteroids. Common side effects include nose and throat irritation, headache, upper respiratory tract infection, sore throat, sinusitis, stomach discomfort, flu, back pain, nasal congestion, vomiting, and thrush in the mouth and throat.

#### Approved Uses for SYMBICORT for Asthma

SYMBICORT is a medicine for the treatment of asthma for people 12 years and older whose doctor has determined that their asthma is not well controlled with a long term asthma control medicine such as an inhaled corticosteroid or whose asthma is severe enough to begin treatment with SYMBICORT. SYMBICORT is not a treatment for sudden asthma symptoms.

**Please see Important Product Information on adjacent page and discuss with your doctor.**

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# IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT SYMBICORT

Please read this summary carefully and then ask your doctor about SYMBICORT.

No advertisement can provide all the information needed to determine if a drug is right for you or take the place of careful discussions with your health care provider. **Only your health care provider** has the training to weigh the risks and benefits of a prescription drug.

## WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SYMBICORT?

People with asthma who take long-acting beta<sub>2</sub>-agonist (LABA) medicines, such as formoterol (one of the medicines in SYMBICORT), have an increased risk of death from asthma problems. It is not known whether budesonide, the other medicine in SYMBICORT, reduces the risk of death from asthma problems seen with formoterol.

**SYMBICORT should be used only if your health care provider decides that your asthma is not well controlled with a long-term asthma control medicine, such as an inhaled corticosteroid, or that your asthma is severe enough to begin treatment with SYMBICORT.** Talk with your health care provider about this risk and the benefits of treating your asthma with SYMBICORT.

If you are taking SYMBICORT, see your health care provider if your asthma does not improve or gets worse. It is important that your health care provider assess your asthma control on a regular basis. Your doctor will decide if it is possible for you to stop taking SYMBICORT and start taking a long-term asthma control medicine without loss of asthma control.

Get emergency medical care if:

- breathing problems worsen quickly, and
- you use your rescue inhaler medicine, but it does not relieve your breathing problems.

Children and adolescents who take LABA medicines may be at increased risk of being hospitalized for asthma problems.

## WHAT IS SYMBICORT?

SYMBICORT is an inhaled prescription medicine used for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It contains two medicines:

- Budesonide (the same medicine found in Pulmicort Flexhaler™, an inhaled corticosteroid). Inhaled corticosteroids help to decrease inflammation in the lungs. Inflammation in the lungs can lead to asthma symptoms
- Formoterol (the same medicine found in Foradil® Aerolizer®). LABA medicines are used in patients with COPD and asthma to help the muscles in the airways of your lungs stay relaxed to prevent asthma symptoms, such as wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can happen when the muscles in the airways tighten. This makes it hard to breathe, which, in severe cases, can cause breathing to stop completely if not treated right away

SYMBICORT is used for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease as follows:

### Asthma

SYMBICORT is used to control symptoms of asthma and prevent symptoms such as wheezing in adults and children ages 12 and older.

### Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

COPD is a chronic lung disease that includes chronic bronchitis, emphysema, or both. SYMBICORT 160/4.5 mcg is used long term, two times each day, to help improve lung function for better breathing in adults with COPD.

## WHO SHOULD NOT USE SYMBICORT?

Do not use SYMBICORT to treat sudden severe symptoms of asthma or COPD or if you are allergic to any of the ingredients in SYMBICORT.

## WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER BEFORE USING SYMBICORT?

Tell your health care provider about all of your health conditions, including if you:

- have heart problems
- have high blood pressure
- have seizures
- have thyroid problems
- have diabetes
- have liver problems
- have osteoporosis
- have an immune system problem
- have eye problems such as increased pressure in the eye, glaucoma, or cataracts
- are allergic to any medicines
- are exposed to chicken pox or measles
- are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. It is not known if SYMBICORT may harm your unborn baby
- are breast-feeding. Budesonide, one of the active ingredients in SYMBICORT, passes into breast milk. You and your health care provider should decide if you will take SYMBICORT while breast-feeding

Tell your health care provider about all the medicines you take including prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. SYMBICORT and certain other medicines may interact with each other and can cause serious side effects. Know all the medicines you take. Keep a list and show it to your health care provider and pharmacist each time you get a new medicine.

## HOW DO I USE SYMBICORT?

Do not use SYMBICORT unless your health care provider has taught you and you understand everything. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist if you have any questions.

Use SYMBICORT exactly as prescribed. **Do not use SYMBICORT more often than prescribed.** SYMBICORT comes in two strengths for asthma: 80/4.5 mcg and 160/4.5 mcg. Your health care provider will prescribe the strength that is best for you. SYMBICORT 160/4.5 mcg is the approved dosage for COPD.

- SYMBICORT should be taken every day as 2 puffs in the morning and 2 puffs in the evening.
- Rinse your mouth with water and spit the water out after each dose (2 puffs) of SYMBICORT. This will help lessen the chance of getting a fungus infection (thrush) in the mouth and throat.
- Do not spray SYMBICORT in your eyes. If you accidentally get SYMBICORT in your eyes, rinse your eyes with water. If redness or irritation persists, call your health care provider.
- Do not change or stop any medicines used to control or treat your breathing problems. Your health care provider will change your medicines as needed
- While you are using SYMBICORT 2 times each day, do not use other medicines that contain a long-acting beta<sub>2</sub>-agonist (LABA) for any reason. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist if any of your other medicines are LABA medicines.
- SYMBICORT does not relieve sudden symptoms. Always have a rescue inhaler medicine with you to treat sudden symptoms. If you do not have a rescue inhaler, call your health care provider to have one prescribed for you.

Call your health care provider or get medical care right away if:

- your breathing problems worsen with SYMBICORT
- you need to use your rescue inhaler medicine more often than usual
- your rescue inhaler does not work as well for you at relieving symptoms
- you need to use 4 or more inhalations of your rescue inhaler medicine for 2 or more days in a row
- you use one whole canister of your rescue inhaler medicine in 8 weeks' time
- your peak flow meter results decrease. Your health care provider will tell you the numbers that are right for you
- your symptoms do not improve after using SYMBICORT regularly for 1 week

## WHAT MEDICATIONS SHOULD I NOT TAKE WHEN USING SYMBICORT?

While you are using SYMBICORT, do not use other medicines that contain a long-acting beta<sub>2</sub>-agonist (LABA) for any reason, such as:

- Serevent® Diskus® (salmeterol xinafoate inhalation powder)
- Advair Diskus® or Advair® HFA (fluticasone propionate and salmeterol)
- Formoterol-containing products such as Foradil Aerolizer, Brovana®, or Perforomist®

## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS WITH SYMBICORT?

SYMBICORT can cause serious side effects.

- Increased risk of pneumonia and other lower respiratory tract infections if you have COPD. Call your health care provider if you notice any of these symptoms: increase in mucus production, change in mucus color, fever, chills, increased cough, increased breathing problems
- Serious allergic reactions including rash; hives; swelling of the face, mouth and tongue; and breathing problems. Call your health care provider or get emergency care if you get any of these symptoms
- Immune system effects and a higher chance for infections
- Adrenal insufficiency—a condition in which the adrenal glands do not make enough steroid hormones
- Cardiovascular and central nervous system effects of LABAs, such as chest pain, increased blood pressure, fast or irregular heartbeat, tremor, or nervousness
- Increased wheezing right after taking SYMBICORT
- Eye problems, including glaucoma and cataracts. You should have regular eye exams while using SYMBICORT
- Osteoporosis. People at risk for increased bone loss may have a greater risk with SYMBICORT
- Slowed growth in children. As a result, growth should be carefully monitored
- Swelling of your blood vessels. This can happen in people with asthma
- Decreases in blood potassium levels and increases in blood sugar levels

## WHAT ARE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF SYMBICORT?

### Patients with Asthma

Sore throat, headache, upper respiratory tract infection, thrush in the mouth and throat

### Patients with COPD

Thrush in the mouth and throat

These are not all the side effects with SYMBICORT. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist for more information.

**NOTE:** This summary provides important information about SYMBICORT. For more information, please ask your doctor or health care provider.

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## + WHY COLIN Kaepernick = STEVE YOUNG

### When You Can Play Fast And Loose, It Doesn't Mean You Can't Be a Precision Weapon

→ HE PLAYS FOR Steve Young's former team and has a similar skill set. So it's inconvenient to point out that Colin Kaepernick, a native of Wisconsin, grew up idolizing Brett Favre, whose Packers knocked San Francisco out of NFC playoffs three straight years during the prime of Young's career. In particular, Kaepernick admired Favre's supreme self-assurance, his inclination to attack. "He played without fear," the 49ers' quarterback recalled before heading into a meeting at training camp. "He just went out there and winged it."

The Kaepernicks moved to Turlock, Calif., when Colin was four, and brought their Cheeseheads with them. While the boy's allegiance remained with Favre, he became aware of and intrigued by the play of Young. "He was different from most quarterbacks, as far as the scrambling, what he was able to do with his legs," Kap says. "And he went out and he won games."

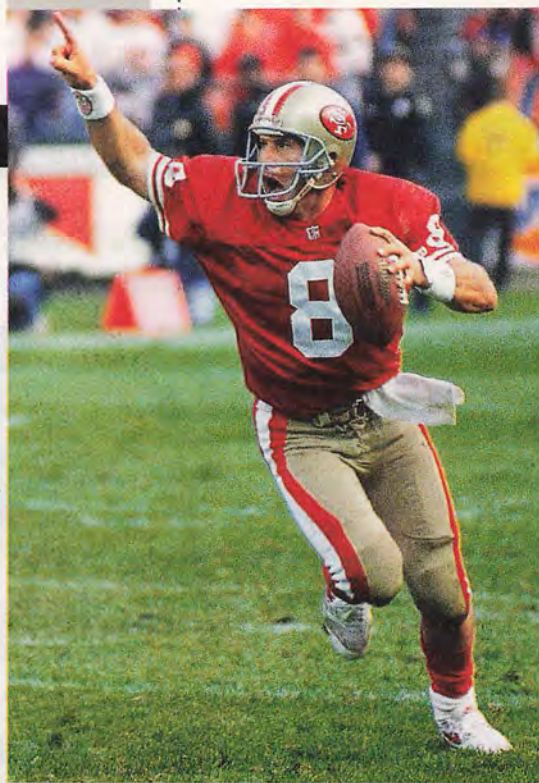
Hmm. Whom else could Kaepernick be describing? He has far more in common with Young than he did with Favre—parallels that extend beyond their on-field styles and NFL teams. Both played in the Western Athletic Conference (Young at BYU, Kaepernick at Nevada); both wound up with the Niners; both became embroiled in quarterback controversies that ended when the other guy got traded to the Chiefs (Joe Montana in 1993, Alex Smith last March).

Kaepernick's career has mirrored Young's, albeit in highly condensed form. It took Young 10 sea-

sons to make it to the Super Bowl as a starter. (He was the MVP of Super Bowl XXIX, San Francisco's 49–26 rout of the Chargers.) It took Kaepernick 10 games—the final 10 of his second season. "I mean, the first competitive NFL two-minute drill he had in his career was in the Super Bowl to win it," Young recently told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "And he almost did!"

"Inevitably," Young added, "there will be challenges. And he'll learn along the way."

Yes, the equation seems not quite balanced. Young endured the trials of Job before finally vaulting out of Montana's shadow. Where is Kaepernick's adversity? Ten starts, and he's on stage accepting an ESPY for best breakout athlete. Ten starts, and his jersey is the NFL's best seller? The 25-year-old generated a fair amount of tongue-clucking in the off-season by appearing to have fun. There were



Kaepernick (below) has not had to endure the same trials as Young, but his rapid rise has not altered his work ethic.

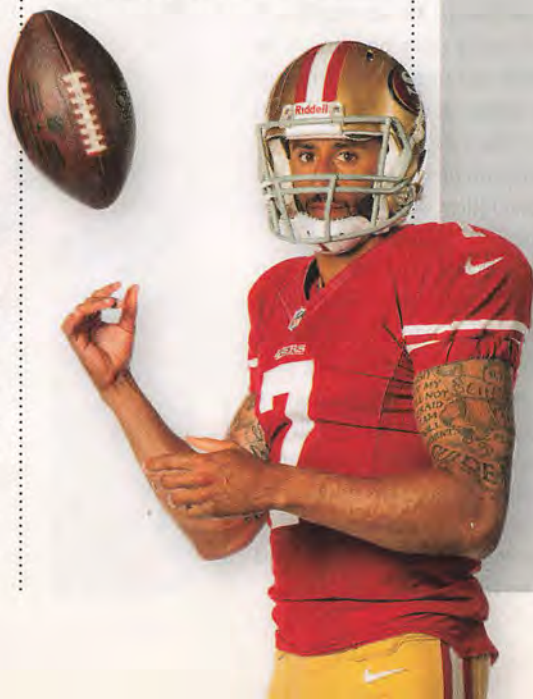
reports of him taking his leisure at the Playboy mansion with Dodgers sensation Yasiel Puig. He provoked a media furor by . . . wearing a Dolphins hat to the beach.

Did any of that behavior faze the 49ers' coach? "He's had an outstanding off-season," Jim Harbaugh says. "Top-notch."

"During OTAs I'd get here pretty early," says wide receiver Kyle Williams. "This is *before* our workouts. I see this guy out on the field running 200-yard sprints. Kap works harder than everybody."

"If you don't do that," explains Kaepernick, "people aren't gonna respect you as a leader, they're not gonna want to follow you, because you're not putting in the same work they are."

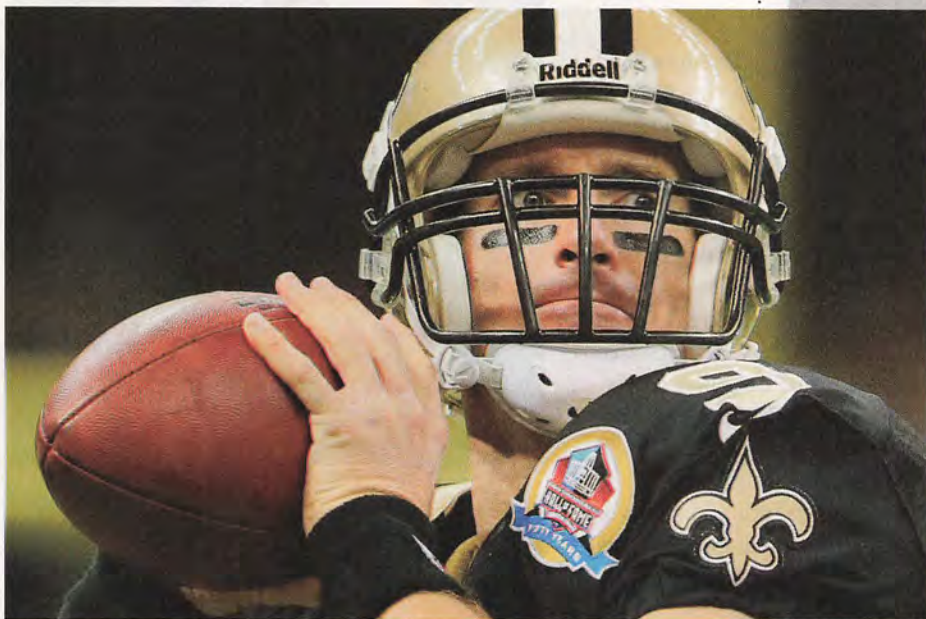
And so Kaepernick enters his first full season as a starter. Without apology. Without an established second receiver to play opposite Anquan Boldin. Without fear. —Austin Murphy





## + WHY RUSSELL WILSON = DREW BREES

### When You're Barely Six Feet, It Doesn't Mean Your Career Is Six Feet Under



→ LAST SEASON'S Pro Bowl was special for Russell Wilson. The Seahawks' star became one of only nine quarterbacks ever selected for the game as a rookie, and he met his athletic idol, Saints quarterback Drew Brees.

Wilson's interest in Brees borders on obsession. He thinks, throws, talks, prepares and generally carries himself like the former Super Bowl MVP, who is as classy as he is talented. Wilson is so versed on all things Brees that he didn't have any burning questions when he finally sat and chatted with him. "I pretty much knew everything about him already," Wilson said later. "I had read his book twice."

His admiration for Brees began when he was a teenager in Richmond. Each time Russell watched Brees on TV, he saw himself: a player who refused to accept critics' contention that he was too short.

Wilson [right], who read the book on Brees [twice], got schooled on footwork by the Saints' quarterback at the Pro Bowl.

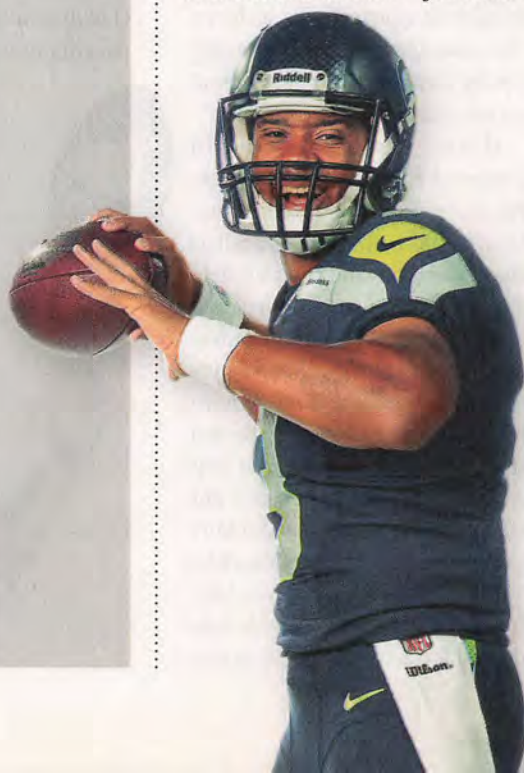
Brees, who is listed generously at six feet, won a Big Ten championship at Purdue and an NFL title with the Saints. He accomplished those feats by pushing himself on the field and immersing himself in the playbook off it. He believed failure was a stepping stone, not a setback, and he lavished attention on the smallest details—attitudes that the 5' 11" Wilson adopted.

Last season, during a lull in practice, then Seahawks defensive coordinator Gus Bradley asked Wilson about his throwing motion. Bradley thought he'd get a simple answer, but Wilson delivered a postgraduate-level lecture on the science behind his release, all the way down to making sure his thumb was pointed at the ground when he let go of the ball.

"That's very cool," Brees said after hearing the story. "Maybe when you keep hearing early on in your career that you're lacking so many things, which is what he's heard and what I heard throughout college—not big enough, not strong enough, not fast enough, not tall enough—you become extra focused on the little things and the details, because [they're] what is going to give you the edge, despite what other people say."

At the Pro Bowl, Brees told Wilson he'd noticed a flaw in Wilson's footwork. When he returned home, Wilson went to the team's indoor training facility and, late at night, after everyone else was gone, went about correcting the problem.

Yet for all their similarities, Brees sees a major difference. "He's more talented than I am," he says. "He's more athletic. He grasped the NFL game at a faster pace than I did. He has not only great leadership qualities, great charisma, but also the It factor that you look for in a young quarterback. I couldn't be more impressed. You watch the road he traveled, and you're happy for him and root for him."—*Jim Trotter*



DAVID GRUNFELD/NOLA.COM/THE TIMES-PICTAYUNE/ANDREW BREES; ROBERT BECK/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (WILSON)





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## MUST-SEE

**TV** Sportvision's famous *first-down line* has become essential to football broadcasting



**I**N THE 1990s, employees at the Silicon Valley startup Sportvision painted an entire football field, scaled to one-eighth regulation size, on a garage floor. They used it to develop a crucial innovation for football broadcasting: "1st & Ten," a computerized yellow line that these days is familiar to anyone who watches the sport.

The first-down line debuted in 1998 on ESPN. Now it's standard on all NFL broadcasts and most college games. "Back then, it used to take five racks stacked full of computers to do the calculations in real time," Sportvision CEO Hank Adams says. "Now we can do it with one computer."

That computer turns the image of a football field into a "green screen." Sportvision's software must account for the crown of each football field and process video input from up to six cameras. The perspective of the field changes each time a producer cuts to a new camera, and it changes again each time a camera pans or tilts. The software, aided by human operators, must also calibrate for anything that crosses the path of the first-down line.

**DRAWING THE LINE:** Sportvision uses three cameras on each side of the field to turn the gridiron into a "green screen." Producers can then project the first-down line, red zone and other details onto the field for TV viewers.



After 15 years, the company has gotten 1st & Ten down to a fine art. In doing so, it has revolutionized the experience of watching football. The yellow line helps even casual fans understand how far an offense needs to move for a first down. TV producers can show additional graphics, like down, distance or when a team enters the red zone, providing viewers with a quick, clear grasp of what's happening.

Sportvision has grown to dominate its field. The company holds patents on systems that enhance broadcasts of baseball, hockey, NASCAR, Olympic sports and more. At Sportvision headquarters in Mountain View, Calif., it's not unusual to see employees using cameras on the roof to film baseballs fired out of pitching machines or capture model cars zooming around the parking lot.

For football, the company is now exploring live player tracking. Small devices attached to players will allow users to follow not only the player's trail of movement, but also his current speed, distance covered and season stats. The system isn't ready to launch yet, but once it does, Adams is betting viewers will love it. "We'll have stuff you didn't see on camera," he says. "We'll be able to create second-screen experiences, where you can watch plays from different angles and play a live video game along with it."

There's no telling how such technology might influence future generations of fans. Jed Drake, an ESPN executive who helped launch 1st & 10, recalled that a colleague's son once attended a live game and expected to see the yellow line visible on the actual field.

Perhaps that's the definition of true innovation: something that is briefly revolutionary, then so necessary—so ubiquitous—that you only really notice it when it's gone. —Amanda May

**DRIVING CHANGE:** Visit [si.com/sportstech](http://si.com/sportstech) to see videos and read more about key sports innovatoins.



# IT'S LIKE HAVING EYES IN THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD. (NOT YET AVAILABLE FOR QUARTERBACKS.)

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NFL PREVIEW 2013

# DEZ BRYANT IS A GROWN MAN

Physical skills? The Cowboys' wideout has always had those. Now that his talent and maturity are in better balance, he's finally ready to take off as a pass-catching star

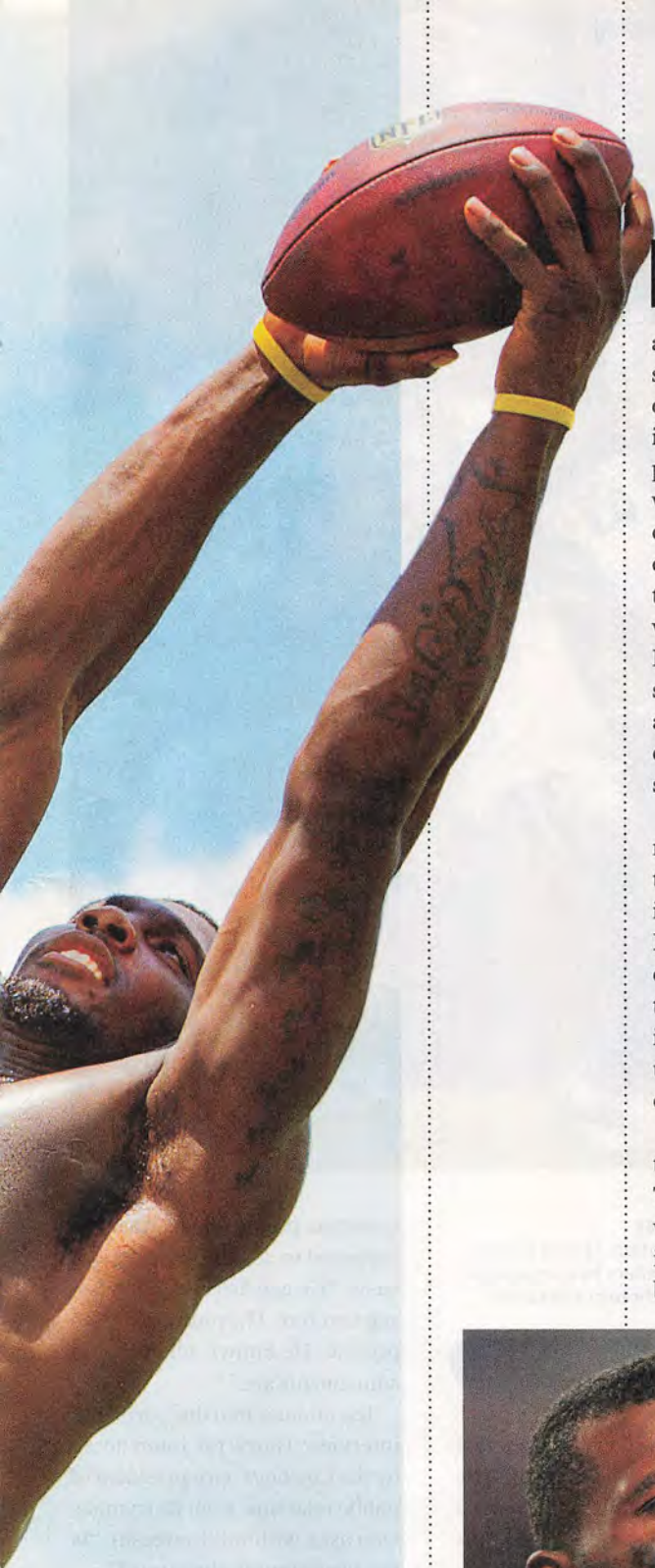
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**BY AUSTIN MURPHY**

Photograph by GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED







→ DEZ BRYANT is not just sorry. He is calling from his Bentley to let a reporter know that he is “super, super, super, *super* sorry”—roughly one *super* for each hour that he is overdue for an interview and photo shoot that he agreed to a week earlier. The Cowboys’ receiver is calling now to decant his contrition and to announce, at last, that he will be at the team facility within the half hour. Even before Bryant is finished apologizing, the stiffed sportswriter—worn down and codependent from decades of dealing with star athletes—is assuring him that it’s no problem.

But it is a problem. That’s the message from various figures in the Cowboys’ complex, including the indispensable Marilyn Love, executive assistant to team owner Jerry Jones. Her phone calls to Bryant on this humid morning have ignited enough of a fire under his backside to roust him out of his house and into his car.

“I saw it in college all the time,” says Derek Dooley, the ex-Tennessee Volunteers head man who is now Bryant’s position coach in Dallas. When a chasm exists between a player’s talent and his

level of accountability, “sometimes there’s a lot of enabling that goes on. The people around him say, ‘He’s so gifted, we’ll cut him some slack, offer a shortcut.’”

Now entering his fourth NFL season, the 6’ 2”, 222-pound Bryant is about to blow up, in the good way, in large part because the Cowboys have throttled way back on the slack that they’re willing to cut him. Bryant—whose 92 catches for 1,382 yards and 12 touchdowns in 2012 “barely scratched the surface” of his abilities, according to coach Jason Garrett—is poised to realize his vast potential. While Bryant’s play down the stretch last season constituted a two-month highlight reel, his best catch might have been a touchdown against the Giants in October that was erased upon further review (a finger touched down out-of-bounds), but which Babe Laufenberg, for one, can’t forget. “He takes off from the middle of the end zone and makes this unbelievable grab,” says the ex-Dallas quarterback and current Cowboys radio analyst. “The guy defies physics, like Dr. J.”

Bryant is ridiculously gifted, but for the longest time his stores of talent and his maturity were out of balance. He wasn’t a bad seed: He didn’t steal, do drugs or get in trouble with the law. Yet stories about Bryant usually included the modifier “troubled.”

In his rookie year, Garrett recalls, “we could have fined him five hundred times. He’s late for this, late for that. The meeting’s at 8:30; he’s not in the meeting. Where is he? He’s in the equipment room talking to the equipment guys; he’s throwing the ball around. He misses another meeting. Where is he? He’s sleeping. Why? He was up talking to his girlfriend till five in the morning. Dez, why did you miss Tuesday’s workout? ‘My little son, I had to take him to the doctor.’ [Bryant has two



TIM HEITMAN/USA TODAY SPORTS



boys: Zane, who is five, and three-year-old Dez Jr.] How long did that take? 'Half an hour.' But Dez, you had 23 hours left in the day.

"He had no structure in his life."

As the Cowboys have added structure, the light has gone on for Bryant, who might have been the best receiver in the NFL over the second half of last season—he caught 10 TDs after Week 9, far and away the league high. "It's not like I didn't *want* to do things the right way," Bryant says. "I just really never knew how to get there, if that makes sense."

No one ever questioned his love of the game or his work ethic. "Dez is one of my favorite teammates I've ever had," says eight-time Pro Bowl tight end Jason Witten. "I gravitated toward him early because of his passion for the game. What's happening now is that he's raised the bar for himself. He's attacking meetings the way he attacks practices and games. He's becoming a true pro."

Late in a scrimmage during the Cowboys' first day of full contact at their Oxnard, Calif., training camp, Bryant ran a 12-yard square-out to the right sideline. It wasn't his best or his crispest route; he didn't get much separation from the cornerback. Unfazed, quarterback Tony Romo forced a bullet through a welter of arms. The ball hit Bryant in the left shoulder pad, but he somehow pinned it to his body with one arm.

Standing on the sideline, a longtime team observer noted, "A year ago, there's no way Romo makes that throw. That's why Dez is going to have a big year. Romo trusts him now."

The QB himself has a simple explanation for Bryant's recent, dramatic improvement. "More than anything, Dez has made football a routine. He already had the com-



#### MATURING ASSET

Bryant's reception, TD and yards-per-catch numbers have improved in each of his three pro seasons.

peting aspect of it. He loves that aspect. But there's a lot of little stuff the job entails, and it can be tedious. This is an all-day job. Part of his growth has come from his ability to start thinking about the game on a level deeper than just competing and playing. Once he started to grasp that, he started to improve overnight."

True, the 24-year-old still squirms his way through meetings. But he's in the room. He has become, as Garrett says, "a more

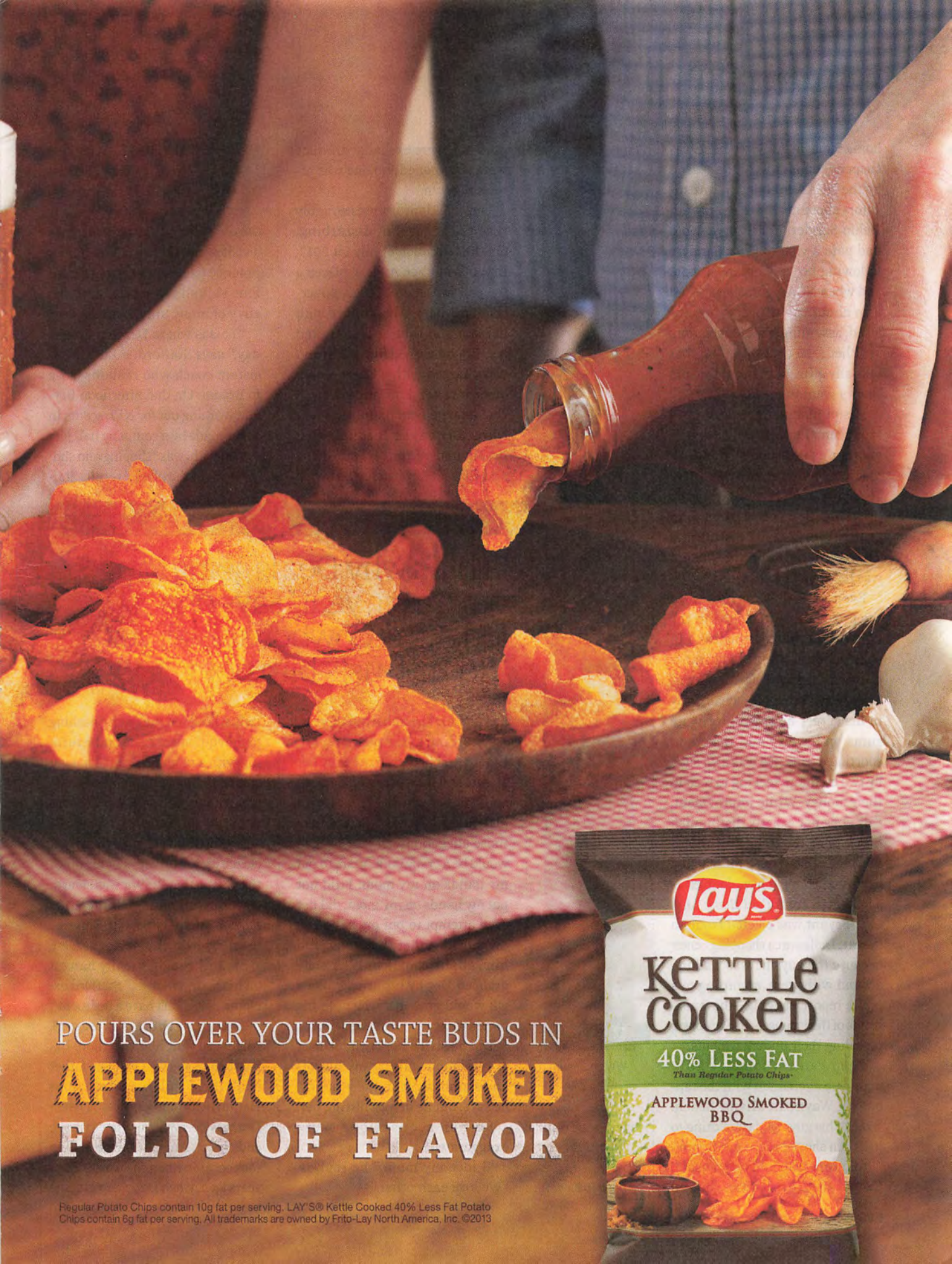
consistent person," doing what he's supposed to do on a more regular basis. "He gets back to you when you text him. His routes are more precise. He knows what his hot adjustments are."

Ten minutes into this particular interview, Garrett is interrupted by the Cowboys' vice president of public relations, Rich Dalrymple, who asks with mild sarcasm, "Is the two minutes almost up?"

"It's O.K.," Garrett interjects. "I love this kid. I love talking about him. I want to make sure it's presented the right way."

The implication: Bryant is often presented in the wrong way. This most misunderstood of Cowboys has made unwanted headlines dating back to his junior year at Okla-





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homa State, in 2009, when he was suspended for most of the season by the NCAA for lying to investigators about his relationship with Deion Sanders. The 20-year-old had paid a visit to Chez Sanders following his sophomore season, and when NCAA gumshoes asked him about the trip Bryant panicked, assuming it was a violation.

"I lied," he concedes. "I didn't take any gifts. But I should've told them I went to his home."

His punishment seemed (and still seems) excessively harsh—another example of NCAA overreach. "He's never been arrested. He's never tested positive for drugs," his high school coach, John Outlaw, later told the *Lufkin* (Texas) *Times*. "The only thing he ever did was lie when he got scared."

Even after Bryant moved to the pros, falling to No. 24 in the 2010 draft (despite being No. 1 in some mocks), his off-field transgressions had a penny-ante flavor: They weren't that big a deal. Early in his career he spent profligate sums on jewelry and tickets to sporting events. He was also sued by two creditors seeking to recoup their money. While improvident, this does not exactly distinguish him among the fraternity of professional athletes. In a March 2011 incident that might have doubled as a lost scene from *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*, Bryant was ejected from an upscale Dallas-area shopping center because the guys he was walking around with were, according to a police report, sagging—the waistbands of their trousers had drooped, revealing their undergarments.

Then came a January 2012 nightclub altercation with the rapper Lil Wayne in Miami Beach. "One of his guys said something to me, then shoved me," says Bryant. "I told him he could've just said, Excuse me." Profanities, but no

punches, were exchanged. Police were summoned; no one was arrested. Yawn.

One incident unquestionably rose to the level of disturbing. On the afternoon of July 14, 2012, Bryant's mother, Angela, placed a 911 call to DeSoto, Texas, police, claiming that she had argued with her son and that he'd assaulted her. Bryant turned himself in and was charged with a Class A misdemeanor for domestic violence. The charge was dismissed last November on the condition that Bryant undergo anger counseling and that he not be charged with

**F**OOTBALL'S A big deal here in Texas, Brooke Stafford is noting, somewhat redundantly, as he escorts a visitor into Lufkin High's indoor practice facility, a 37,000-square-foot Valhalla that would be the envy of many universities.

"This is where Dez had his pro day," says Stafford, a Lufkin assistant coach who remains close to Bryant. On that afternoon Bryant, working out for NFL scouts in shoes made by a company he'd just signed with, was "slipping and sliding all over the place," recalls Staf-

"That's why Dez is going to have a big year," says one longtime Cowboys observer. "Romo trusts him now."

a crime for the subsequent year.

According to the police report, Bryant grabbed his mother by her T-shirt and hair, bruised her arms and "hit her across her face with his ball cap." Asked by SI to address those allegations, Bryant says, "I would be a crazy dude, man, to put my hands on my mom. I did not put my hands on my mom, did not even attempt to put my hands on my mom"—other than to defend himself, he clarified. When she grabbed Dez by his arms ("like a DB would grab me"), he used his hands to remove hers, he says.

Did he strike her with his hat? "I remember taking my hat off and slamming it on the ground," he says, but he denies hitting her.

So her accusations were exaggerated?

"I love my mom," he replies. "We love each other."

ford, who saved the day by dashing to the equipment room and returning with a pair of Nikes. "That got spun into this story, completely untrue, that he forgot to bring shoes to his own pro day."

Stafford hung on to both pairs of cleats, just as he keeps in his office the plaque that Bryant was awarded for being named to the 2007 Parade High School All-America team following his senior season. "[Bryant] couldn't really hang it on his bedroom wall," Stafford explains. "He didn't have a bedroom."

After giving birth to Dez at age 15, Angela Bryant had two more babies before she was 19. (The father of all three children, MacArthur Hatton, was in his early 40s when Dez was born.) Struggling to make ends meet, Angela started selling rock cocaine when she was 19. Four years later, when Dez was eight, she

#### The M M Q B

Watch Jason Garrett's welcome-to-training-camp speech and read Andy Benoit's Deep Dive analysis of the Cowboys at [TheMMQB.com](#)



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was arrested for selling crack to a police informant, and she spent 18 months at the Lucile Plane State Jail in Dayton, Texas, an hour and a half down Route 59 from Lufkin.

While his mother was incarcerated, Dez moved in with Hatton, from whom he is now estranged. That move began an unstable, nomadic period that lasted until his senior year at Lufkin, when

hung on to football as a lifeline."

This was Dez Bryant distilled to three sentences. Before his junior season Bryant met with Stafford, whose duties include making sure that the transcripts of students who aspire to play college football pass NCAA muster. For Bryant that path looked especially daunting. Diagnosed with a learning disability in elementary school, he'd been taking



he moved in with his girlfriend at the time. Those frequent changes of address overwhelmed Bryant's high school coach, Outlaw, who told *The New York Times* in 2008 that "I [took] him to probably six or seven different places he called home. . . . He was from trailer to trailer and house to house."

Outlaw died two days before Christmas in 2011, felled by a heart attack at 58. While they certainly mentioned his 303-87-3 record as a coach, obituaries gave greater emphasis to his advocacy for the underdog. One quotes a coworker describing the young men the coach gravitated toward: "Those kids who had unstable lives at home. Those kids who needed someone to believe in them. Those kids who

**SHOW ME THE WAY**  
As the Cowboys have helped Bryant find structure in his life, he's become a favored target for Romo [9].

special-education classes. He didn't even get on the field for the Panthers varsity until late in his sophomore season, but with two years of high school remaining, Bryant informed Stafford that he wanted to take regular classes in order to meet the NCAA's standards.

According to Stafford, Bryant had been steered into special ed more for his behavior than for any learning issues. When he bore down, "Dez could do the work," says the coach. "And he did it."

In his junior and senior seasons, Bryant met all the core requirements for math and English. "He basically resurrected himself."

Bryant's unwavering belief in himself served as a polestar to help him navigate the changes of address, the stigma of special ed and the confusion he felt while in high school, when his mother explained that her sexual orientation had changed, that she was gay.

Regardless of the roof over his head, he drifted off each night with the certitude that he had been put on earth to play football: It would raise him up and out of Lufkin. "I always felt chosen," he says. "By that I mean, God gave me the ability to help myself and my family. I always had that in my head."

"Dez knew what he wanted, and knew how to make it happen," says Stafford. "He's always had his eye on this moment."

**H**E HAS *not* always had his eye on the clock. Three hours and 45 minutes after the scheduled appointment, he rolls into Valley Ranch. After posing for a photographer for an hour, he decides it's time to lift some weights; the interview has to wait. "Meet me at David's house at 5:30," he tells this reporter, who replies, wishfully, "It's a date!"

David Wells, whom Bryant describes as an adviser, is a brusque, profane and delightful character, personable yet somehow vaguely menacing, who appears to have sprung from the pages of an Elmore Leonard novel. The Dallas-based former bail-bond magnate is well-known to the city's cops, lawyers and judges; one former D.A. nicknamed him The Wolf, after the problem solver played by Harvey Keitel in *Pulp Fiction*. Wells's unique ability to smooth



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over legal problems and keep them out of the media has made him a valuable ally to professional teams in the Metroplex. And his business has been good to him: He lives down the street from Bryant in a tony part of DeSoto, in a sprawling home whose amenities include a basketball court, swimming pool, in-home theater and a game room where, on this evening, Wells is running the table on a family friend in a lopsided game of eight ball.

Sitting on a bar stool, smiling at his host's trash talking ("We got a major ass-whupping goin' on right now"), is Josh Brent, who has been at Wells's place nearly every day since being arrested last December on a charge of intoxicated manslaughter in the death of Cowboys teammate Jerry Brown Jr. (Brent's trial begins on Sept. 23.) In the interim Brent, 25, has twice tested positive for marijuana. On July 18 he retired from football in order to get "the priorities in my life in order."

Wells's lavish abode is a kind of home for wayward Cowboys. Bengals cornerback Adam (Pacman) Jones lived there during his one-year tenure with Dallas, in 2008. Even as he values his friendship with Jones, it angers Wells when people suggest that Bryant's missteps are remotely equivalent to the serial malfeasance of Pacman. "Dez was in this house when he got drafted three years ago," says Wells. "I've watched him mature into a man. This is a good person."

But not, alas, a totally reliable one. At our appointed hour of meeting, Bryant rolls up to Wells's house in his black Bentley . . . and keeps on rolling. He's going to play some hoops at a nearby 24 Hour Fitness, he shouts through the open car window. He'll be back in half an hour.

Ninety minutes later, the reporter walks into the health club. Bryant's brother, Shaun, intercepts him.



"I always felt chosen," Bryant says. "God gave me the ability to help myself and my family."

"We'll be at David's in a half hour." Two hours after that, the reporter gives up and checks into a hotel.

Bryant seems miffed, the following morning, to find the reporter parked in front of his house. Walking across the yard, he is unsmiling. "What did you want to talk about?"

The uninvited visitor wants to delve into Bryant's upbringing. Why did he move so often? Did he ever go without food or shelter?

"I knew it," he says. But he's not going there. "Me and my family aren't ready to talk about that," he declares with finality, before adding what can only be described as a teaser. "When you hear the whole story, I promise you, you're gonna be overwhelmed."

Zane, his five-year-old, has emerged from the front door. But where is Dez Jr.? "He's been in a timeout," Bryant explains, "for

spraying mustard on the floor."

Tough to blame a three-year-old for being amused by the flatulent sound created by a squeezed mustard dispenser, the visitor points out. On the other hand, discipline is an important part of parenting.

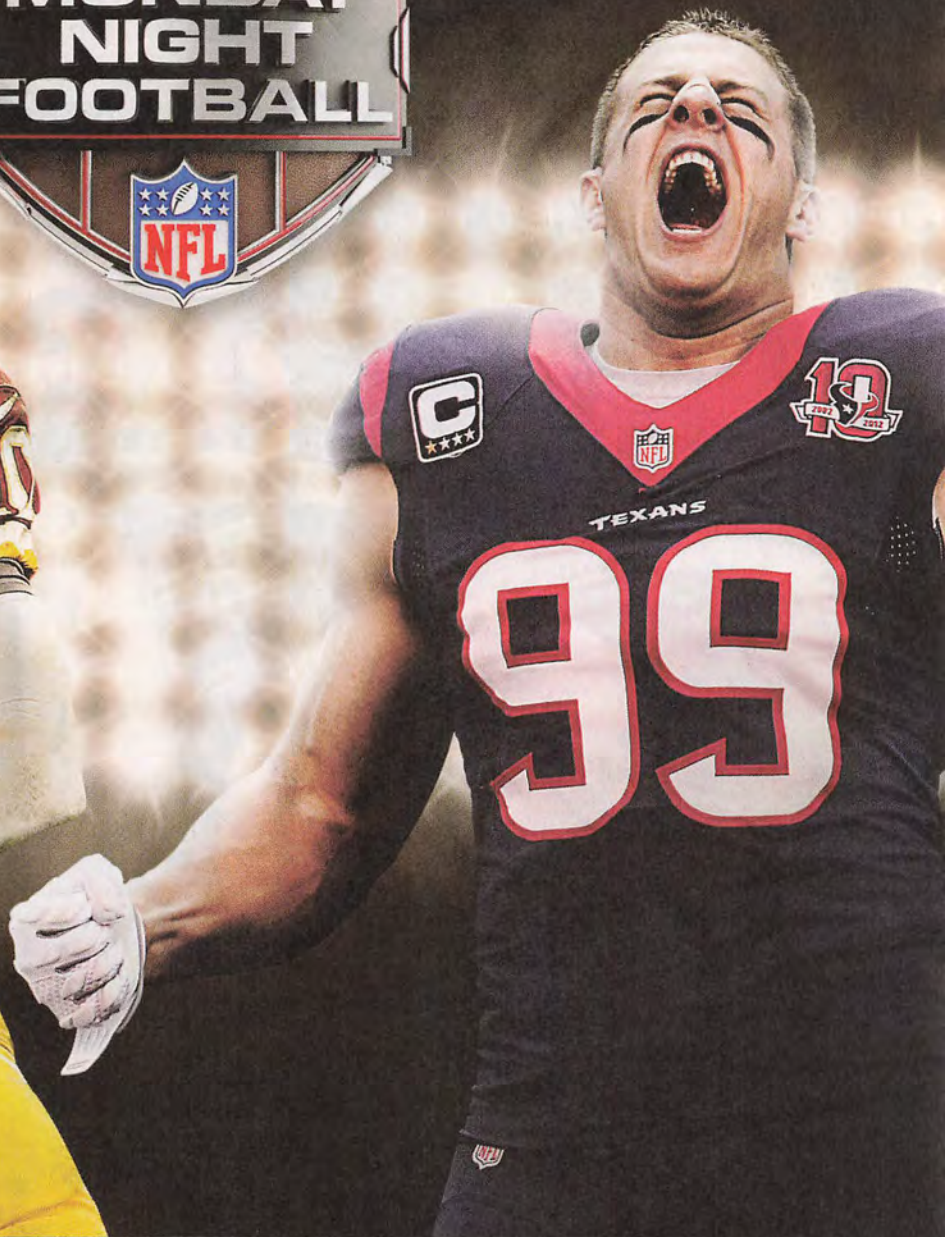
"I don't coddle 'em," says Bryant.

He is determined to give his boys a smoother, more *structured* upbringing than his own. "They are my life, my heart," he says, his initial reserve now melted. "I couldn't control what was going on around me when I was younger. But I control everything now."

"I'm a work in progress, just like everybody else in this world. I've made mistakes, and I won't go down that path again. I've been through the bad things already. There ain't nothing but the *right* things for me from here on out."

Better late than never. □





MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9<sup>TH</sup>



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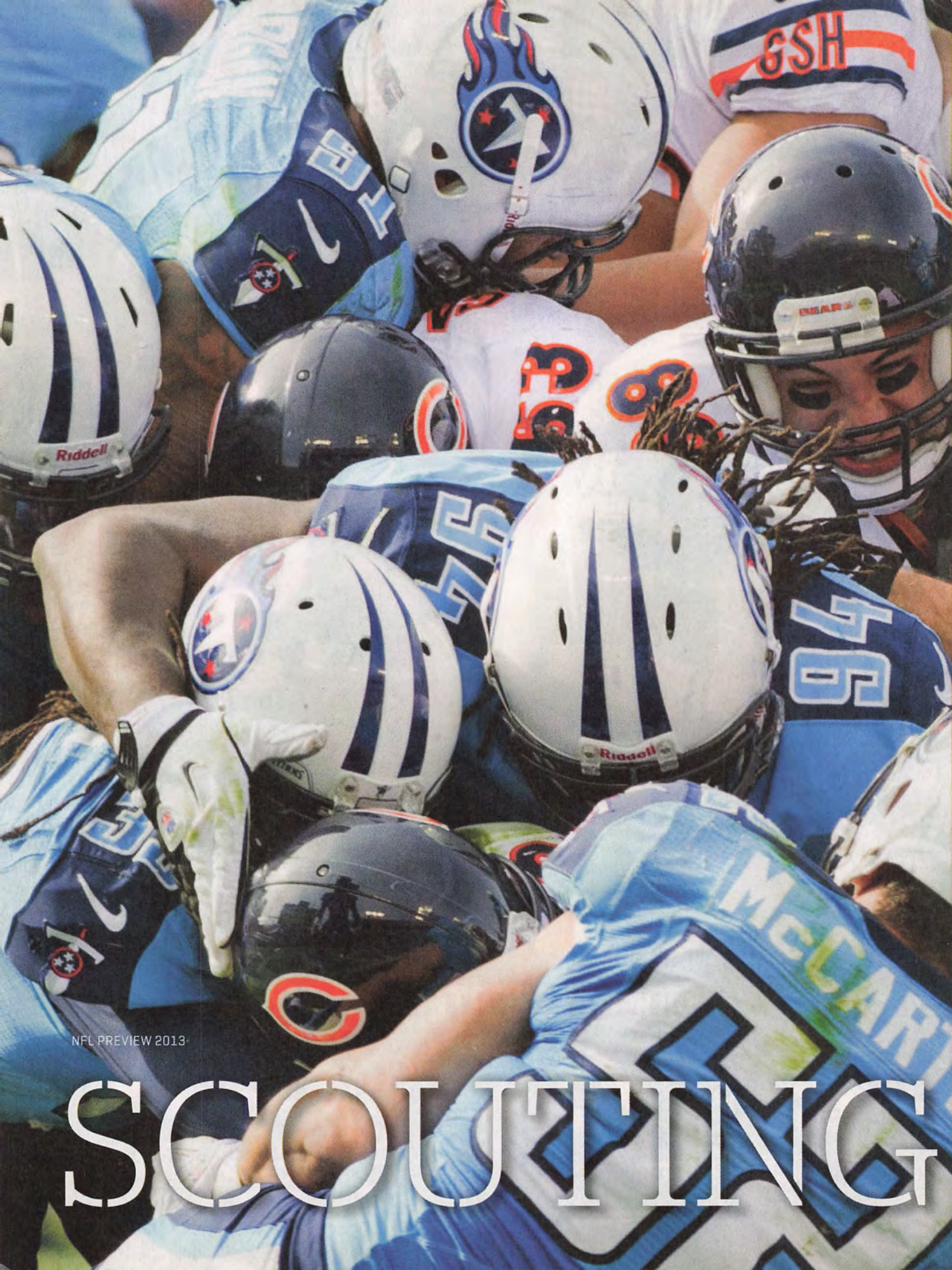
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NFL PREVIEW 2013

# SCOUTING



#### COME TOGETHER

Got to be a joker if you think the Titans and the Bears will make the playoffs, but the battle for berths in January does figure to be crowded and tight.

Photograph by  
AL TIELEMANS/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

### PETER KING'S PREDICTIONS

#### AFC EAST

PATRIOTS (1)	12-4
BILLS	7-9
DOLPHINS	6-10
JETS	3-13

#### AFC NORTH

BENGALS (3)	10-6
RAVENS (5)	10-6
BROWNS	7-9
STEELERS	7-9

#### AFC SOUTH

COLTS (4)	10-6
TEXANS (6)	10-6
TITANS	7-9
JAGUARS	4-12

#### AFC WEST

BRONCOS (2)	11-5
CHIEFS	7-9
CHARGERS	5-11
RAIDERS	3-13

#### NFC EAST

GIANTS (4)	9-7
REDSKINS	9-7
EAGLES	8-8
COWBOYS	7-9

#### NFC NORTH

PACKERS (3)	10-6
VIKINGS	9-7
BEARS	8-8
LIONS	6-10

#### NFC SOUTH

FALCONS (2)	10-6
SAINTS (6)	10-6
BUCCANEERS	8-8
PANTHERS	6-10

#### NFC WEST

49ERS (1)	11-5
SEAHAWKS (5)	11-5
RAMS	8-8
CARDINALS	7-9

NUMBER IN  
PARENTHESES:  
PLAYOFF SEED

### PLAYOFFS

#### WILD CARD

BENGALS 20, TEXANS 16  
RAVENS 24, COLTS 20

#### DIVISIONAL ROUND

PATRIOTS 23, RAVENS 20  
BRONCOS 30, BENGALS 13

#### CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

PATRIOTS 30, BRONCOS 27

#### WILD CARD

SAINTS 33, PACKERS 27  
SEAHAWKS 27, GIANTS 17

#### DIVISIONAL ROUND

49ERS 34, SAINTS 23  
SEAHAWKS 31, FALCONS 27

#### CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

SEAHAWKS 27, 49ERS 22

### SUPER BOWL XLVIII

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Turn the Page for Peter King's Pick

# REPORTS



# Peter King's Super Bowl Prediction

**PATRIOTS**  
**30**

**SEAHAWKS**  
**23**



→ DURING MY visit to Eagles camp earlier this month I saw the team work for two hours and 20 minutes, and the offense didn't huddle once. At the end of each play, guys trotted back to the line. No walking. Later, in their first two preseason games, rookie coach Chip Kelly used the no-huddle on a remarkable 93% of his plays.

Speed is of the essence throughout the league. On my trip this summer for TheMMQB.com, I visited 23 teams, and I saw many outfits—the 49ers, Bills, Cowboys, Giants, Jaguars and Seahawks stuck out—working in fast-paced offenses, often incorporating the no-huddle. A trend? Yes, more teams will be playing faster, but that's been happening for a while. Check out the average number of offensive plays per game by a team in each of the past five years, starting in 2008: 61.9, 62.9, 63.1, 63.6 and, last year,

Quick: Name a team that doesn't have issues in 2013. Can't? Then as champs I'm picking the team whose leader can provide the fastest fixes



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Which teams could throw a wrench in Brady's big plans? Watch Peter King's 32 team preview videos to find out. Free for subscribers at [SI.com/activate](http://SI.com/activate)

64.2. In five seasons that's an increase of almost five offensive plays per game if you include both teams.

It won't be just those teams with athletic QBs picking up the pace. And it won't be just no-huddle masters Tom Brady and Peyton Manning calling plays at the line. Almost every team's toying with it. Joe Flacco, hardly the fleetest guy, used the no-huddle extensively during the Ravens' Super Bowl run, and he's been working on it in camp. Eli Manning too. Teams see the advantage of playing fast in order to keep defenses from subbing to match up.

"We've gone in a few years from the offense being pretty static, to incorporating motion—and now the hurry-up's in vogue," says Chris Palmer, an NFL assistant and head coach of 22 years. "Offenses [are] trying to exploit mismatches and dictate the game to defenses. Not everyone can do it. Playing fast requires a smart quarterback. Look at

New England—they ran the equivalent of two-and-a-half extra games last year. [The Patriots ran 1,191 plays, second most in NFL history.] Tom Brady made that happen."

Brady's mastery of the up-tempo game and his team's ability to seamlessly incorporate new skill players explain why SI is picking the Pats to win the Super Bowl for the first time since the 2004 season.

New England's Super Bowl XLVIII opponent, the Seahawks, will be even faster and more explosive in the stretch drive, when new wideout Percy Harvin returns from hip surgery. Without a playmaker of his caliber last year, Seattle came within a last-second Falcons field goal of reaching the NFC title game. But Russell Wilson is a year wiser, and the Seahawks believe they're strong enough to overcome the 49ers in what has become the best division in football, the NFC West. On that, I agree.





fig. a



## 2013 AWARDS Predictions

**O**F THE eight coaching hires this off-season, seven were offensive guys. I find three of those particularly intriguing: Kelly, from wide-open Oregon; the Bears' Marc Trestman, from the CFL's Montreal Alouettes (that was a shocker; the NFL doesn't *do* Canada); and the underrated Doug Marrone, late of Syracuse, by the Bills.

Last summer, their third together with the Orange, Marrone and offensive coordinator Nathaniel Hackett overhauled their staid playbook and went up-tempo, studying Oregon, Missouri and Toledo before installing a new-wave scheme in August. By the time the players got the hang of it last October, Syracuse went on a roll, finishing 6-1 and averaging 36.1 points. "It was exciting," says Hackett, "and a lot of guys wanted to touch the ball. How do you do that? You increase the number of plays." Marrone later became a candidate with Cleveland, San Diego, Chicago and Philadelphia before Buffalo offered him the job.

Syracuse averaged 79.1 snaps last year. Buffalo averaged 61.4. Something's got to give.

"We wanted more explosive plays last year," says Marrone. "We kept our playbook [the same]; we just added concepts, and we changed the tempo to go faster. We wanted teams to have to defend everyone."

Here's where technology allows concepts to spread and take hold more quickly. One morning in Pittsford, N.Y., Marrone looked at his watch and noted it was 10:52—20 minutes after a practice had ended. "In 45 minutes," he said, "all of this morning's practice, plus individual cutups, will be on everyone's iPad." Players and coaches could shower, grab an early lunch then pick up tablets and see what they'd done wrong

and right at practice. As Kelly says, "Ten years ago you were dying to get a Peyton Manning cutup. Someone would have to get a Colts tape, transfer it to VHS, then mail or FedEx it. Now it's over the Web; you can literally have it in 30 seconds. That's a huge edge in teaching."

So now you can learn fast from fast-paced teams, including the Patriots. The thing is, those won't be the same Pats in 2013. Last season Brady targeted wideout Brandon Lloyd 16 times in one game, running back Danny Woodhead 10 in another, tight end Aaron Hernandez 19 in another and receiver Wes Welker 18 in another. All four are gone, and the other top pass catcher from '12, tight end Rob Gronkowski, is out for the time being. But you know Brady. Life is a series of adjustments.

A fourth title for Brady is even possible because so many question marks surround the other contenders. The Broncos' pass rush is in shambles; the Ravens have no idea who Flacco's biggest targets will be; the Falcons still wonder whether Matt Ryan is a February quarterback; the 49ers' Colin Kaepernick has started just 10 NFL games; and the Texans don't know what they'll get out of vital but nicked-up running back Arian Foster. In essence, my pick of New England—over a team like, say, Baltimore, which shares the same essential problem, a lack of proven pass catchers—is a vote of confidence in Brady, a guy who can take spare parts and get them ready quickly. In the words of one daily observer of the Patriots, Brady is "ridiculously laser-focused. If it's [running back] Shane Vereen or [tight end] Zach Sudfeld he has to depend on, he'll figure it out."

The Pats ran 205 more plays in 2012 than in '10, and they're not going to slow down. They've

used a fast-paced offense consistently in camp, and Brady's first three drives of the preseason traveled 80, 80 and 80 yards. Touchdown, touchdown, touchdown.

Can teams be both up-tempo and efficient? New England makes it look easy. But as one coach who has studied that offense says, "Going fast is one thing; going fast and playing good is another. None of it matters if you're not running the offense well, and Tom [Brady] is a master at it—slowing down, speeding up. You can't just say Philadelphia's going to be great running the no-huddle. Tom knows his linemen have the answer for any problem. The Eagles can't know that yet. They might be great at it, but running something so fast so soon is going to be tough. New England [has] a lot of subliminal communication. If your quarterback can't communicate like that with his line, you're going to lead the league in three-and-outs."

For the conference finals, I'm picking four teams that will be proficient in the up-tempo offense: the Patriots, Seahawks, 49ers and Broncos. Any of them could win it all. I wanted to fall in love with an underdog on my tour—a Carolina or a Miami—but I just couldn't. Seattle steamrolled teams late last year, putting up 36.2 points per game in a 6-0 season-ending run before faltering in the final minute in Atlanta. There won't be any Russell Wilson skeptics by the time of the frosty Super Bowl five months from now.

But there aren't many believers in Brady *right now*. After eight seasons of knocking hard on the door, he'll finally break through with a cast of skill characters whose names we'll come to know throughout the fall. □

Turn the Page for  
Conference Power Rankings

Most  
Valuable  
Player  
**TOM  
BRADY**  
QB, Patriots

Offensive  
Player of  
the Year  
**CHRIS  
JOHNSON**  
RB, Titans

Defensive  
Player of  
the Year  
**GENO  
ATKINS**  
DT, Bengals

Offensive  
Rookie of  
the Year  
**EDDIE  
LACY**  
RB, Packers

Defensive  
Rookie of  
the Year  
**TYRANN  
MATHIEU**  
FS, Cardinals

Comeback  
Player of  
the Year  
**ROBERT  
GRIFFIN III**  
QB, Redskins

Coach of  
the Year  
**SEAN  
PAYTON**  
Saints





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## New England PATRIOTS

# 1

→ TOM BRADY won three Super Bowls in his first four seasons as a starting quarterback; he's a two-time league and Super Bowl MVP; and he has a better than four-to-one touchdown-to-interception ratio since 2007.

Now 36 and entering his 14th season, Brady may be facing the biggest challenge of his NFL career. At a time when most teams are trying to keep their franchise quarterbacks viable by importing high-priced talent, the Patriots are staring at a less than desirable reboot of their passing game.

Brady will likely start the season without his top four pass catchers from a year ago. Wes Welker, one of Brady's best friends and the first NFL receiver with five 100-catch seasons, is now hauling in passes from Peyton Manning. Brandon Lloyd was released in March and is looking

for his seventh team in 10 years. Rob Gronkowski is recovering from arm and back surgeries and could miss the start of the season. And, of course, Aaron Hernandez is in jail, charged with first-degree murder in the death of Odin Lloyd.

BY  
GREG  
BEDARD

It's been an off-season of upheaval, but long before the tumult, the braintrust had identified the source of their offensive struggles in the postseason.

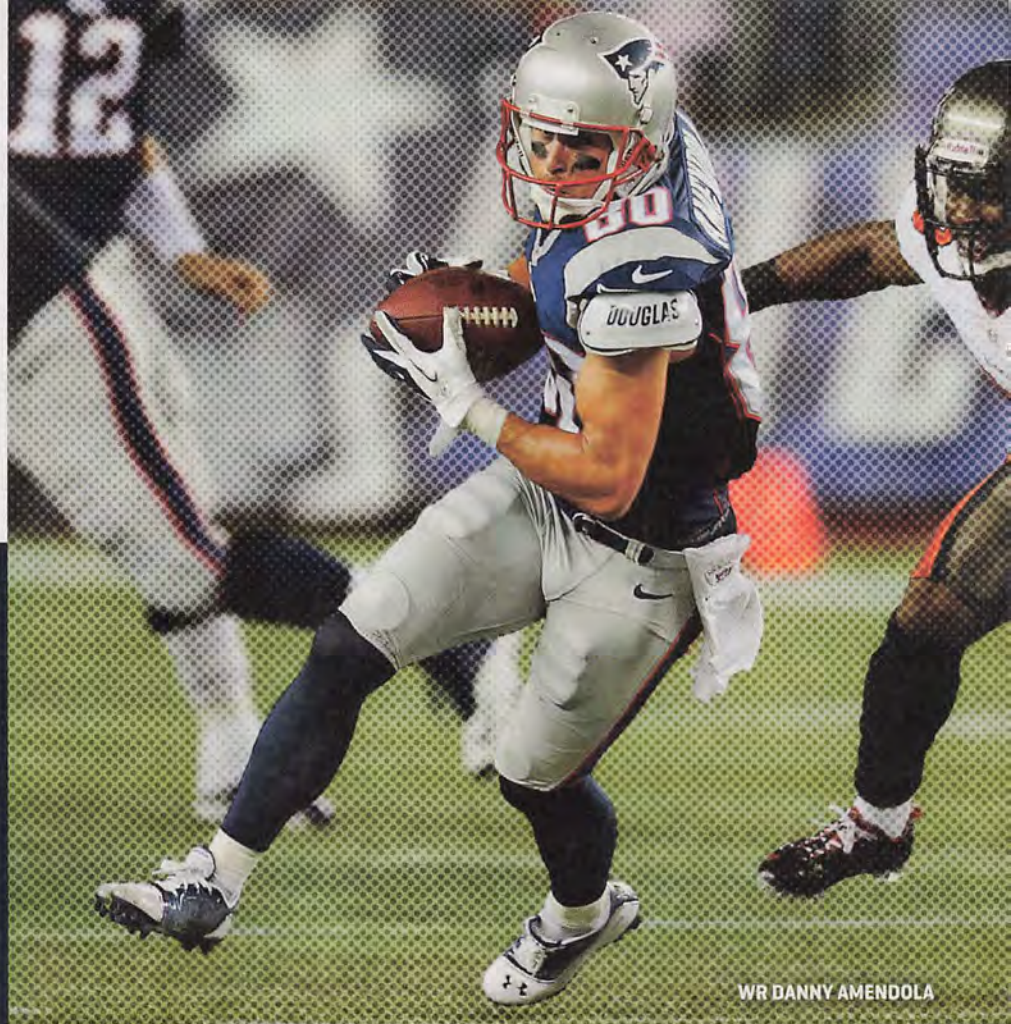
The Pats did go through a changing of the guard in 2006, when their top two receivers, Deion Branch (trade) and David Givens (free agency), departed. But Brady had tight end Benjamin Watson, running back Kevin Faulk and receiver Troy Brown in his back pocket to pick up the slack then.

Now, Julian Edelman (21 catches in 2012), Shane Vereen (eight) and Stevan Ridley (six) are New England's only significant holdovers for the opener against the Bills.

Even before the receiving corps's mass exodus, a major

tweaking of the Patriots' passing offense was in the works. In their last five postseason losses, dating back to a 17-14 loss to the Giants in Super Bowl XLII, the Pats averaged only 15.8 points after averaging 32.6 points in those five regular seasons. Coach Bill Belichick could no longer deny that in the biggest games and against the best defenses, the Patriots failed to get it done offensively. In Welker, Gronkowski and Hernandez the Patriots had three of the most prolific targets in the game. But they all did their best work in the middle of the field. Without viable targets on the outside to shift coverage, they could be slowed up by clogging the middle.

New England replaced the 32-year-old Welker with the Rams' Danny Amendola, who's 27. The new slot receiver, who is often compared with Welker, has battled injuries the past two seasons, but



WR DANNY AMENDOLA



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>FEB. 25</b>	Re-sign QB Tom Brady
<b>MARCH 13</b>	Lose WR Wes Welker [DEN]
<b>MARCH 14</b>	Sign WR Danny Amendola [STL]
<b>MARCH 16</b>	Cut WR Brandon Lloyd
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft LB Jamie Collins [Southern Miss], WR Aaron Dobson [Marshall]
<b>JUNE 10</b>	Sign QB Tim Tebow [NYJ]
<b>JUNE 26</b>	Cut TE Aaron Hernandez

**ANALYSIS** The myth about Brady's extension is that he took less money. The truth: He'll receive more dough over the next two seasons than previously scheduled while lowering his cap number—both sides win. The Pats showed less love to their QB by not prioritizing Welker as a core player [the way they did, say, Hernandez] and by replacing him with Amendola, suggesting Brady should get similar production from the new guy, which will be a challenge. Tebow is worth a no-risk look, but likely in spot roles as a TE, FB or H-back, not as a QB3. [New England only carried two QBs in '12.] The lingering effect of Hernandez's murder case will be changes in future character evaluations by the club.

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade



## THE CASE FOR ...

### Running back Shane Vereen

A player with 308 rushing yards and eight catches in his first two seasons might not be the first person you think of as being a secret weapon for the powerful Patriots, but Vereen should be just that. A second-round pick out of Cal in 2011, his career barely got off the ground after a balky hamstring limited him to five games as a rookie. But two TDs last season showed Vereen's potential: an 83-yard wheel route in which he outran the entire Jets D and a 33-yard over-the-shoulder grab in a playoff win over the Texans. With RB Danny Woodhead and TE Aaron Hernandez gone, the job of Swiss Army knife in the Pats' offense falls to Vereen. A tad thin at 5' 10" and 210 pounds when he entered the league, Vereen added muscle this off-season, making him more resilient on runs between the tackles. And yet he hasn't lost any of his 4.49-second 40 speed. He also remains one of the team's most natural pass catchers. Previously, Hernandez gave the Patriots' no-huddle attack an edge because he could play running back, receiver or tight end, meaning that New England didn't have to slow down to change personnel. Now, Vereen can be deployed in the same way. —G.B.



## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 12-4

**SEPT. 8** at Buffalo **12** New York Jets [Thu] **22** Tampa Bay **29** at Atlanta  
**OCT. 6** at Cincinnati **13** New Orleans **20** at New York Jets **27** Miami  
**NOV. 3** Pittsburgh **10** BYE **18** at Carolina [Mon] **24** Denver  
**DEC. 1** at Houston **8** Cleveland **15** at Miami **22** at Baltimore **29** Buffalo

**SOFT SPOT** The Pats haven't lost an opener since a drubbing 10 years ago in Buffalo, where they've since won eight of nine. They then get the Jets on a short week, allowing more time to prepare for the Bucs' new-look secondary.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 1

QB TOM BRADY				
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
401	63.0	4,827	34-8	98.7

### TE ROB GRONKOWSKI

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
55	790	14.4	11

### WR DANNY AMENDOLA (N)

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
63	666	10.6	3

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 25

DT VINCE WILFORK		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
48	3	0

### LB JEROD MAYO

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
147	3	1

### FS DEVIN MCCOURTY

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
82	0	5

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION

when he's on the field, Amendola is more athletic and can be effective both inside and outside.

The Patriots also took two receivers in this year's draft (the first time since 2002), selecting Aaron Dobson, an athletic boundary receiver, and Josh Boyce, who runs an extensive route tree. None of the eight wideouts drafted by the Pats since '02 have become starters in the NFL. The Patriots have had so many draft and free-agent busts (e.g., flameouts Chad Ochocinco and Joey Galloway) at wide receiver in large part because of their complex playbook and Brady's style of play. With countless pre- and postsnap adjustments built into every pass route, a receiver has to be able to see each play just as the QB does.

"You need to think fast and communicate well," says Brady. "Everyone's got to be on the same page, so it's hard to slow down something for one person. It takes really smart football players to be in this system. Guys that have done well have been smart players who can adjust quickly."

Amendola seemingly fits the bill and has quickly connected with Brady on the field. So have receiver Kenbrell Thompson and tight end Zach Sudfeld. Both were undrafted free agents this spring, but they quickly showed the size, speed, smarts and hands to become the first to contribute of the rookie pass catchers.

The Patriots' passing game, with coordinator Josh McDaniels back in charge, is evolving out of necessity. It's not the normal course of action with a veteran QB like Brady, but if he can make it work, the Patriots could end up with a passing offense that, for the first time since 2007, has to be defended in all areas of the field. And that can be the difference in this year's playoff run. □



A

+

Denver  
BRONCOS

2



RB MONTEE BALL

→ TELL US, Montee Ball, about the difference between playing running back in the Big Ten and in the NFL.

"The players aren't *that* much faster than college," says the 5' 10", 215-pound rookie, "but they're smarter." At Wisconsin, he recalls, "coaches would tell us, Watch that safety rotation—the direction they rotate tells you where the blitz is coming from. Up here, they do a great job rotating safeties, but right before the snap, they *rotate back!*"

Ball was in fine spirits on this August afternoon, having scored two TDs—one rushing, one receiving—against the first-string defense in a red-zone scrimmage. It was his best pro practice to this point, and it helped improve his position in one of the more intriguing camp battles of this preseason. The Broncos see themselves on the cusp of a Super Bowl, but to get there they knew they needed to upgrade

You want to be a running back in the Mile High City? Great. One thing, though: Peyton Manning's got a job for you—and it has nothing to do with running the ball

+

BY  
AUSTIN  
MURPHY

their ground game. While Denver's Peyton Manning-led offense ranked second in scoring (30.1 ppg) and fourth in passing yards (3979), the Broncos were just so-so on the ground, averaging 114.5 yards, 16th overall. To add some oomph, they drafted Ball with the 58th pick, then cut aging, injury-prone Willis McGahee, last year's starter.

His absurd production at Wisconsin, where he rushed for 5,140 yards and 77 TDs, leaves little doubt that Ball can ball. It'll help his transition that Denver runs a zone-blocking scheme; Ball excelled at finding cutback lanes in the same system at Wisconsin. He comes to the NFL with a reputation for excellent vision and the patience to set up his blockers. But as Ball is finding out, the most important prerequisite for all Broncos running backs is not, in fact, running. Yes, they need to make defenders miss, catch passes out of

the backfield, and move the chains, but first and foremost, they must keep blitzers and rushers off the 37-year-old future Hall of Famer, the guy who is constantly flashing hand signals at them just before the ball is snapped.

It was this challenge that curtailed Ronnie Hillman's playing time last season. Hillman, Denver's third-round pick in 2012, is a fast-twitch, change-of-pace runner with superb burst. But he struggled in protection, and his time on the field reflected it. This season, says coach John Fox, Hillman is vastly improved, which is why he's remained ahead of Ball on the depth chart throughout the preseason.

It's not that Ball is whiffing regularly on blitzers. To the contrary, "Montee's football intelligence is outstanding," says Fox. "I've been very impressed with how fast he's learned." There has, however, been the occasional misadventure. Late



in the first quarter of Denver's warmup at Seattle on Aug. 17, Manning dropped back to pass as Seahawks linebacker Bobby Wagner blitzed. Despite aggressively filling the hole, Ball barely slowed Wagner, who flattened the QB. Ball didn't lose much, if any, ground in the running backs competition during that 40-10 preseason loss. That's because Hillman fumbled twice.

The third entry in Denver's running back derby is also the most reliable at keeping Manning clean. After fumbling against the Falcons in Week 2 last season, Knowshon Moreno found himself exiled to football Siberia, inactive for eight straight games. When McGahee tore an MCL in November, Moreno leapfrogged Hillman, who'd been No. 2 on the depth chart. The ex-Georgia Bulldog proceeded to play lights out, rushing for 510 yards over Denver's final six games.

With Hillman struggling to hold on to the rock and Ball still polishing his pickups, Moreno had a pretty good night just standing on the sideline in Seattle, recuperating from a bruised knee. He gets it: For a team that passes roughly 60% of the time, "protection is the Number 1 issue—that and making sure you're in the right place at the right time. If [Manning] expects you to be someplace, you need to be there." Will he chew guys out for blown assignments? "He's a good dude, but he's a perfectionist," Moreno replies. In other words: Yes.

Moreno was seated at a picnic table outside the dining hall at Broncos camp. Earlier, Manning stood there with a group of military personnel. After thanking them for their service, he posed for a picture. "Everyone get in close," he instructed. So they did, forming a kind of cocoon around the quarterback, as if they, too, understood Job One in Denver: Protect Peyton. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- JAN. 17** Promote QB coach Adam Gase to O coordinator
- MARCH 13** Sign WR Wes Welker (NE)
- MARCH 22** Lose LB D.J. Williams (CHI)
- MARCH 24** Lose DE Elvis Dumervil (BAL)
- APRIL 25** Draft DT Sylvester Williams (UNC), RB Montee Ball (Wisconsin)
- JULY 14** Re-sign OT Ryan Clady
- AUG. 20** Lose LB Von Miller to six-game suspension for substance-abuse violation

**ANALYSIS** The Broncos pounced on Welker's stalled negotiations with the Patriots to strike a deal; if he replicates his success in New England, his \$12 million over two seasons will be a bargain. [Maybe it was karmic retribution that Dumervil left in a similar twist of fate, when his agent missed a contract-restructuring deadline.] The absence of Miller, who ran afoul of the NFL's drug policy, will test a defense already challenged by the Dumervil loss. Off the field, Miller's transgression comes on the heels of two DUI arrests for team execs, capping a disconcerting off-season for the team's brand.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Strong safety Duke Ihenacho

The suspension of Von Miller (18½ sacks in 2012) and the loss of Elvis Dumervil (11) mean one thing: Opposing QBs are going to have a lot more time to throw. And that's O.K. with Ihenacho, who's on a serious roll. In one year since going undrafted, he's transformed from camp body to practice player to promising backup to starter. The son of Nigerian immigrants didn't play football until his junior year of high school, and in Broncos camp a year ago his playmaking was tempered by the fact that his head was swimming. "I'm more confident in my playbook, and my teammates are more confident in me," says Nacho, who had several INTs of Peyton Manning in camp. He was also arguably the best defender on the field against the 49ers in Denver's first exhibition: seven solo tackles, one pass broken up and a forced fumble—all in a quarter and a half. Meanwhile, last year's starting safeties, Rahim Moore and Mike Adams, combined for just three takeaways in '12. There's a cartoon, well known by salesmen and M.B.A.'s, in which one vulture tells another, "Patience my ass, let's kill something!" Ihenacho is the impatient buzzard. And Adams is now his backup. —A.M.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 13-3

**SEPT. 5** Baltimore (Thu) **15** at New York Giants **22** Oakland (Mon) **29** Philadelphia  
**OCT. 6** at Dallas **13** Jacksonville **20** at Indianapolis **27** Washington  
**NOV. 3** BYE **10** at San Diego **17** Kansas City **24** at New England  
**DEC. 1** at Kansas City **8** Tennessee **12** San Diego (Thu) **22** at Houston **29** at Oakland

**SOFT SPOT** Ignore, if you can, that Sunday-night date in Foxboro, and note the two games with K.C.—which had just four FGs in eight quarters against Denver in 2012—and the home gig against the transitioning Titans.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 4

QB PEYTON MANNING				
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
400	68.6	4,659	37-11	105.8

WR DEMARIUS THOMAS				
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
94	1,434	15.3	10	

WR WES WELKER (N)				
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
118	1,354	11.5	6	

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 2

DE DEREK WOLFE		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
40	6	0

LB VON MILLER		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
68	18½	1

LB SHAUN PHILLIPS (N)		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
50	9½	0

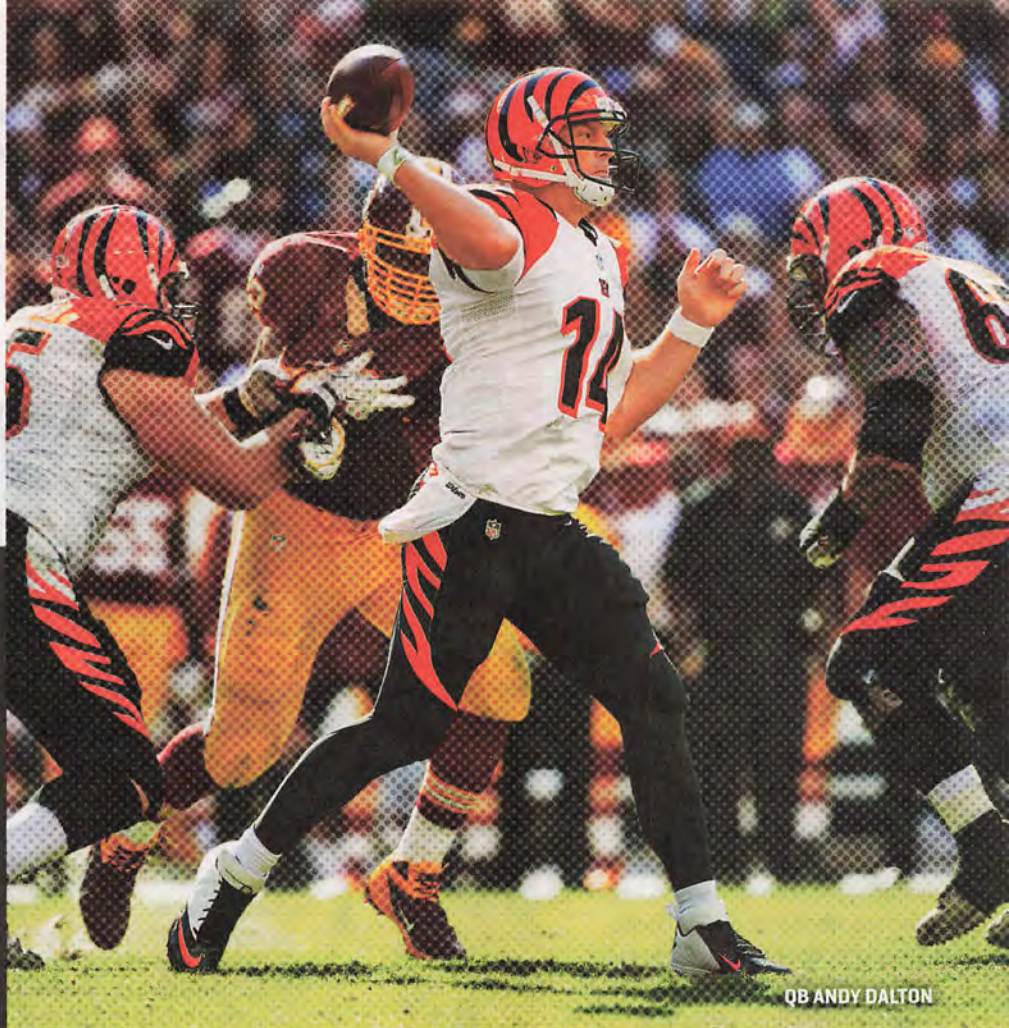
(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION





## + Cincinnati BENGALS

# 3



QB ANDY DALTON



SO, BENGAL NATION, the good news or the bad news?

First, the good: Andy Dalton is the only quarterback in three decades to lead Cincinnati to the playoffs in back-to-back seasons. He's 25 and whip smart. In his '12 sophomore season he had a better passer rating and was more accurate than Jay Cutler and Eli Manning.

Now the bad: January football.

**In his two playoff games, both at Houston, Dalton's been ineffective, completing just one deep throw (longer than 25 yards) to star wideout A.J. Green and underthrowing him noticeably several other times.** In 21 possessions over those two games, Dalton led one TD drive. His postseason TD-to-INT ratio of 0 to 4 led to a passer rating of 48.6.

If you're around the Bengals for a while, you get this distinct sense: *We've built a defense (ranked*

*Andy Dalton has to get better on the deep ball. A.J. Green knows it. Heck, Andy Dalton knows it. But if he can't figure it out? Well, that defense is a horrible thing to waste*

+  
**BY  
PETER  
KING**

*sixth in the league last year, with a franchise player in tackle Geno Atkins) that can win a game in late January. But do we have a quarterback who can?*

When Dalton entered the league in 2011 as the 35th pick—one ahead of Colin Kaepernick—the book on him was pretty much what he's shown so far: He's an efficient offensive commander, able to move the chains with his accurate arm, but without the kind of deep cannon to take advantage of such world-class talent as Green. "I know I [have to throw the deep ball better]," Dalton says. "But it comes down to things other than the throw itself—the footwork, the trajectory, knowing when to let it go. We're working on it a lot."

"Andy's throwing deep a lot better this year," says Green, who should know. "It's about getting our timing down. We're working on it every day."

On one of those days in camp, Dalton took a snap from center in a 7-on-7 drill, with Green split left in man coverage against cornerback Adam Jones. As soon as he took his last step out from center, Dalton hopped on his back (right) foot and let go a rainbow to Green. Forty-eight yards later, the ball settled into the receiver's soft hands, a step past Jones.

Duplicate that 30 times this season, and the Bengals will go far. Deep-into-January far. The team around Dalton is that talented.

For now, Cincinnati is all in on the Red Rifle. "The baton's been passed to him as the leader of this team," says coach Marvin Lewis. "He knows that for us to win in the playoffs, he has to play better. I've seen a lot this off-season that tells me he will."

Offensive coordinator Jay Gruden and Dalton have worked extensively on the mechanics of



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>MARCH 1</b>	Franchise DE Michael Johnson
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Re-sign DE Robert Geathers
<b>MARCH 18</b>	Re-sign LB Rey Mauluga
<b>APRIL 23</b>	Sign LB James Harrison (PIT)
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft TE Tyler Eifert (Notre Dame), RB Giovani Bernard (North Carolina)
<b>APRIL 26</b>	Re-sign OT Andre Smith
<b>JULY 16</b>	Re-sign DE Carlos Dunlap

**ANALYSIS** I've seen many eye rolls at NFL meetings toward owner Mike Brown and his Eeyore-like pessimism, but his shrewd moves are paying off. His 2011 heist of two high draft picks from the Raiders for then retired Carson Palmer is still paying dividends. The defensive line will be especially formidable, with two players recently extended [Geathers, Dunlap] and another two elite guys entering contract years [Michael Johnson, Geno Atkins]. Harrison will add intensity and force behind the line. With Brown deferring even more control to coach Marvin Lewis, the gloom of years past continues to lift.

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B

## THE CASE FOR...

### Strongside linebacker James Harrison

Harrison, who looks very strange in a striped helmet, is 35 now. His best days are long past. Maybe he can't do what Marvin Lewis brought him in to do, which is to rush off the strong side better than ex-Bengal Manny Lawson did last year. "But I think he can still draw some attention around that edge," says Lewis. "And if he does, that takes some of the pressure away from Geno Atkins inside." Not just Atkins, actually. Atkins led the team—and all NFL defensive tackles—with 12½ sacks in 2012, but defensive ends Carlos Dunlap and Michael Johnson combined for 17½ sacks themselves, and Lewis knows one more strong rusher will boost their games as well. **Harrison may not be an every-down player anymore, but even if he gives the Bengals a good presence on third downs alone, he'll be worth the risk that Cincinnati has taken on him** (two years, \$4.45 million). "I love having him on the outside," Atkins said in camp. "It's not just me—it's the other guys who'll benefit. It's good to have him on our team; he's a winner." He's also the kind of one-year fix that could pay dividends, if the Bengals don't overuse him.

—P.K.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 10-6

**SEPT. 8** at Chicago **16** Pittsburgh (Mon) **22** Green Bay **29** at Cleveland  
**OCT. 6** New England **13** at Buffalo **20** at Detroit **27** New York Jets **31** at Miami (Thu)  
**NOV. 10** at Baltimore **17** Cleveland **24** BYE  
**DEC. 1** at San Diego **8** Indianapolis **15** at Pittsburgh **22** Minnesota **29** Baltimore

**DANGER ZONE** Marvin Lewis & Co. better make good use of their bye week before a home stretch in which they host three 2012 playoff teams and visit two longtime contenders who'll be looking to bounce back in '13.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 22

**QB ANDY DALTON**

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
329	62.3	3,669	27-16	87.4

**RB BENJARVUS GREEN-ELLIS**

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
278	1,094	22	6

**WR A.J. GREEN**

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
97	1,350	13.9	11

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 6

**DT GENO ATKINS**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
54	12½	0

**LB VONTAZE BURFICK**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
127	1	0

**FS REGGIE NELSON**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
83	1	3

the deep ball. On a five-step drop, for example, Gruden wants Dalton to plant his back foot on the fifth step and let it go. "Our efficiency," says Lewis, "has to be to get to the last step of the drop and get the ball out. I can show you a throw from this spring where Andy did just that and A.J. laid out for it—he was parallel to the ground, maybe 18 inches off the ground—and caught it. That's what we need."

"Andy will improve," Gruden says. "He made a couple poor decisions in Houston, a couple poor throws. But **we've got to get out of this 'Andy's got to be better' thing. Everybody's got to be better on offense. I've got to call a better game.** Last year we didn't have the running backs to beat [Houston's] linebackers coming out of the backfield. I think we might have a good matchup problem there now [with second-round quick back Giovani Bernard]. Now that we have a versatile tight end in Tyler Eifert, we feel good about preventing defenses from constantly rolling everything to A.J.'s side."

Gruden will field a three-receiver set at times, with the 6' 4" Green and a pair of large ends—6' 5" Jermaine Gresham and Eifert, the 6' 6" rookie from Notre Dame. Dalton's going to have the chance to throw to three athletic basketball forwards in that case.

It was a former Bengals passer, Ken Anderson, who coined the cliché, The quarterback gets too much credit when things go well and too much blame when they don't. But Dalton knows—everyone in Cincinnati knows—that he has to be a more complete passer for this team to play at home in January instead of being a road wild-card team destined for an early exit. □

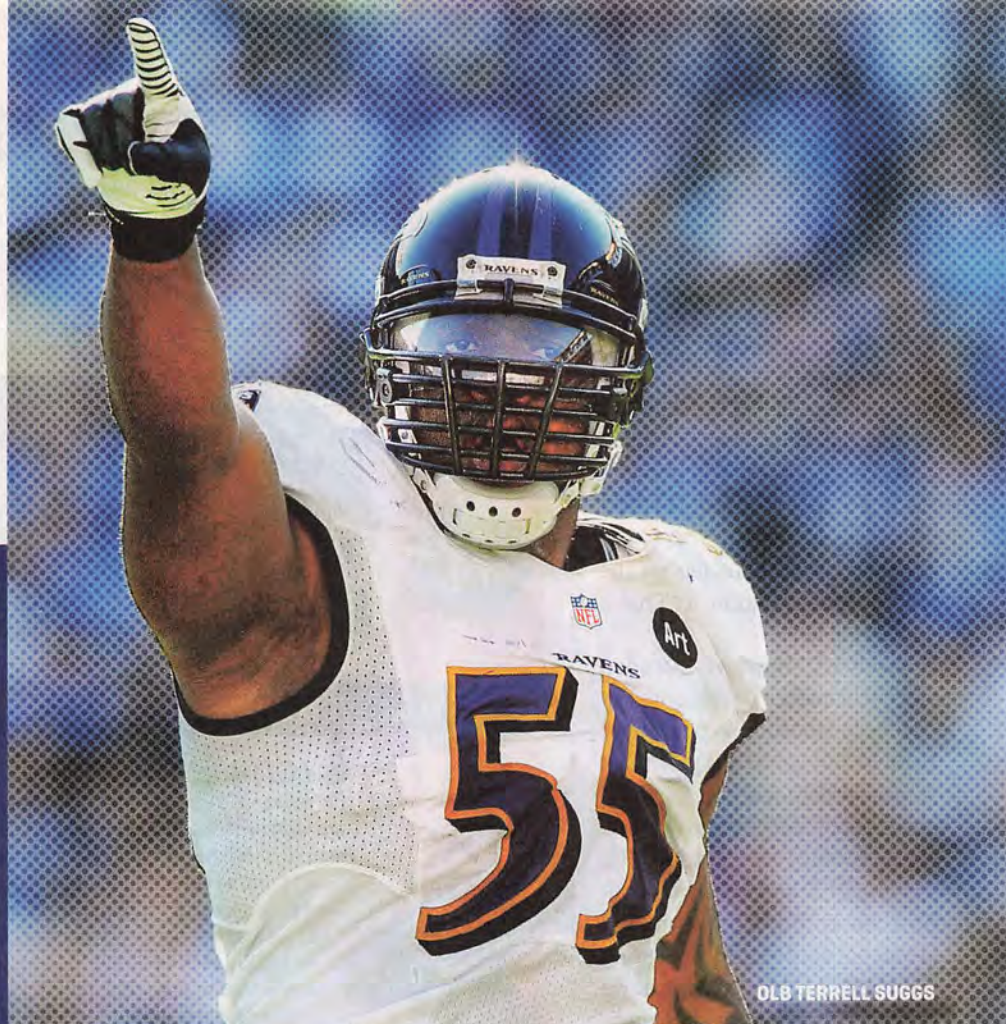






## Baltimore RAVENS

# 4



OLB TERRELL SUGGS

→ NEAR THE end of a minicamp practice in June, Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco floated a pass 25 yards down the right sideline to undrafted rookie receiver Gerrard Sheppard. Sheppard stretched but didn't dive for the ball, which fell to the ground just beyond his fingertips. The voice of linebacker Terrell Suggs rang out from the sideline: "Make a play for your quarterback, [number] 7."

Yes, the Ravens said goodbye to such leaders as linebacker Ray Lewis (retirement), safety Ed Reed (free agency) and receiver Anquan Boldin (trade), all of whom were integral to last season's run to a Super Bowl title. But anyone who thinks Baltimore will have a leadership void this season would do well to recall that scene from a meaningless practice involving a player who likely won't make the final roster.

Ray Lewis, Ed Reed, Paul Kruger, Anquan Boldin... The champs bid adieu to a slew of Super Bowl contributors, but if you think they're crying about those losses, think again

BY  
GREG  
BEDARD

Despite popular story lines, the Ravens have never been about a few rising above the rest.

"They lost some great guys, no doubt," says Titans safety Bernard Pollard, who started last season for Baltimore but was not re-signed. "But it's not about one guy or a group of guys being leaders. All the guys are accountable to each other. That was a brotherhood there."

In this way the Ravens are not unlike the Patriots, who won three Super Bowls from 2001 to '04 with players such as Tedy Bruschi, Willie McGinest, Rodney Harrison and Anthony Pleasant patrolling the locker room and making sure everyone was held accountable.

"An organization or team is not about one guy," says coach John Harbaugh. "I think Ray would tell you that, and I know Ed would tell you that." So Lewis,

Reed and Boldin are gone, but Suggs, Flacco and cornerback Lardarius Webb remain to carry on the tradition and open a drum of whupass if necessary.

"That's one of the reasons I chose to come here," says outside linebacker Elvis Dumervil, a key newcomer. "I felt the leadership was outstanding. And it is."

On the field the defense will be improved, even with Lewis and Reed gone. Their instincts for the game made them effective within their specialties—Lewis against the run and Reed against the pass—but the two, after all, were 37 and 34, respectively, last season.

New middle linebacker Daryl Smith should come close to meeting the standard of his predecessor. The nine-year veteran was the talk of Ravens training camp and the preseason as he seemed to be in on every play. At safety,



Baltimore will lean on the combination of Michael Huff, who underwhelmed for most of his seven seasons with the Raiders, and first-round pick Matt Elam (*sidebar*) to replace Reed and Pollard.

Replacing outside linebacker Paul Kruger, who signed a five-year, \$40 million contract with the Browns, will be easier. Dumervil was the team's top choice among free-agent pass rushers, and Baltimore was able to sign him to a five-year, \$35 million deal. The 5' 11", 260-pound Dumervil had 11 sacks last season and has 63½ in his six-year career. **The defense will also be buoyed by the return of Webb, who was on his way to becoming one of the league's top cornerbacks before surgery on his left knee ended his season after six games in 2012.**

On offense the loss of Boldin is more problematic, especially after tight end Dennis Pitta had hip surgery in July, meaning that he's likely lost for the season. One of the big reasons the Ravens surged to their second Super Bowl victory was a renewed emphasis on owning the middle of the field with Boldin and Pitta after Jim Caldwell took over for Cam Cameron as offensive coordinator in Week 14. That shift in strategy gave speedsters Torrey Smith and Jacoby Jones more room deep and opened all sorts of fresh options for Flacco.

The lack of receivers who run inside with the precision and fearlessness of Boldin and Pitta remains the team's biggest shortcoming—though critics will continue to cite a leadership void. **"Keep questioning it," Suggs says. "[Lewis] left a standard here, and every man on our defense will be held accountable for playing to that standard."** □

Andrew Brandt's Off-season Grade

B



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- FEB. 22** Lose C Matt Birk (retirement)
- FEB. 28** Lose LB Ray Lewis (retirement)
- MARCH 4** Re-sign QB Joe Flacco
- MARCH 12** Trade WR Anquan Boldin (SF); lose LBs Paul Kruger (CLE), Dannell Ellerbe (MIA); sign DE Chris Canty (NYG)
- MARCH 22** Lose FS Ed Reed (HOU)
- MARCH 24** Sign LB Elvis Dumervil (DEN)
- APRIL 25** Draft S Matt Elam (Florida), LB Arthur Brown (Kansas State)

**ANALYSIS** Flacco's extension seemed huge—that is, until Aaron Rodgers, Tony Romo and Matt Ryan surpassed his guaranteed money. Losing Lewis, Kruger, Ellerbe, Reed, Boldin and TE Dennis Pitta (who'll miss 2013 with a fractured hip) presents a challenge; their leadership must be replaced. But the Ravens retooled with a mixture of veterans (Dumervil, Canty) and rookies (Elam, Brown) who could start immediately. Benefiting from a fax snafu between the Broncos and Dumervil's former agent, Baltimore landed a premier pass rusher on a reasonable contract for no draft-pick compensation.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Strong safety Matt Elam

After the Ravens decided not to bring back longtime leader Ed Reed, they drafted Elam out of Florida in round 1. Right now, that's not an even swap (they signed Michael Huff to take Reed's free safety spot), but the team does expect Elam to be an impact contributor soon enough. Just give it time. Before he entered the draft as a junior, there were concerns about Elam's size (just shy of 5' 10" and 206 pounds), but he's quick (4.54 in the 40-yard dash), explosive and a fearless, big hitter—a skill set varied enough that he can play either safety position. And the Ravens have been impressed so far. **"He's a smart player,"** says coordinator Dean Pees. **"He just needs to keep on learning the system."** Elam exhibited that intelligence early on, becoming the first rookie the Ravens recall to have negotiated his own contract, without an agent. He might not be a starter on Day One, but Baltimore needs his young legs in the secondary. James Ihedigbo, another very smart player, is currently filling the strong safety spot. But he's mostly been a special teams and sub package contributor over his career. Elam will be the total package. The only question is when. —G.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 10-6

**SEPT. 5** at Denver (Thu) **15** Cleveland **22** Houston **29** at Buffalo  
**OCT. 6** at Miami **13** Green Bay **20** at Pittsburgh **27** BYE  
**NOV. 3** at Cleveland **10** Cincinnati **17** at Chicago **24** N.Y. Jets **28** Pittsburgh (Thu)  
**DEC. 8** Minnesota **16** at Detroit (Mon) **22** New England **29** at Cincinnati

**SOFT SPOT** Thanks to their Thursday-night season kickoff, the Ravens get extra time to prepare for a home opener against the Browns. And those trips to Buffalo and Miami shouldn't be daunting to the defending champs.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 16

#### QB JOE FLACCO

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
317	59.7	3,817	22-10	87.7

#### RB RAY RICE

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
257	1,143	61	10

#### WR TORREY SMITH

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
49	855	17.4	8

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 17

#### NT HALOTI NGATA

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
51	5	0

#### LB TERRELL SUGGS

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
22	2	0

#### CB LARDARIUS WEBB

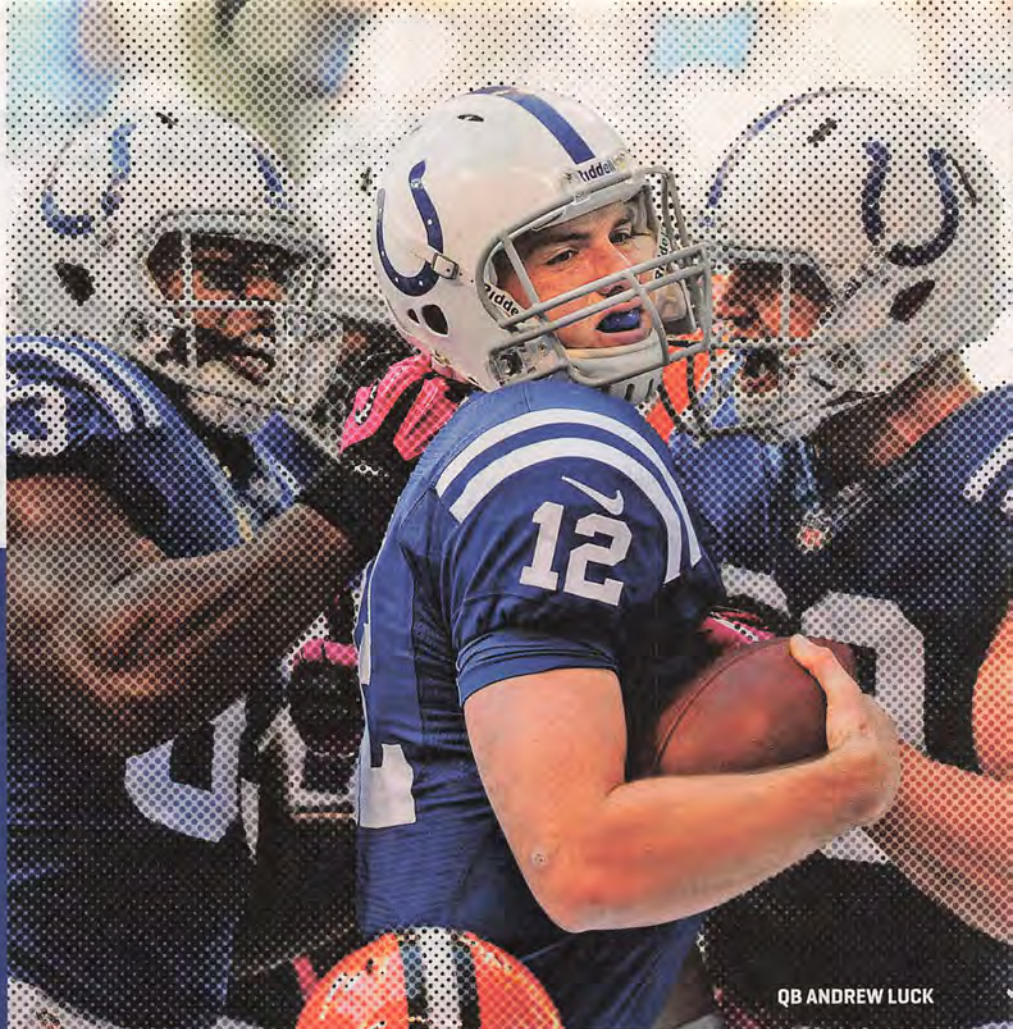
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
25	0	1



A

Indianapolis  
COLTS

5



QB ANDREW LUCK

→ THE OFF-SEASON promise made by offensive coordinator Pep Hamilton of a more balanced attack isn't so crazy when you consider the pieces with which he has to play. Under Hamilton's predecessor, Bruce Arians, the Colts were as aggressive with the downfield game as any franchise in the league. Hamilton favors a West Coast-style offense that integrates a power running game with more intermediate passing routes. That's where a pair of second-year tight ends enter the picture.

Dwayne Allen and Coby Fleener first hit it off at the 2012 NFL combine in Indy. Afterward they were seated together on a plane headed west, where Allen was training and Fleener lived. Bored, they daisy-chained their headphones and watched a movie on Fleener's computer. "It was some terrible, sappy love movie, the only thing

The running game has some new Pep in its step, but the tight ends could benefit the most from a new commitment to the West Coast offense

BY  
ROBERT  
KLEMKO

I had on my laptop," Fleener says. "When it was over, we thought we'd say goodbye and never see each other again."

"Then comes draft day and I hear my name [No. 34, to Indianapolis]. The next day I found out the Colts took another tight end. I was kind of shocked. I saw it was Dwayne and I was all excited because we had gotten along so well. I had no idea what the plans were."

The plan is to frequently daisy-chain the two players at the line of scrimmage to alleviate the pressure on a novice offensive line and a quarterback who spent more time on his back than all but three passers in 2012. Hamilton is placing fresh bets on the downhill running of second-year back Vick Ballard (814 yards in 2012) and a play-action punch that will lean heavily on Allen and Fleener, both of them strong receivers.

It makes sense to former Jets

safety LaRon Landry, signed by Indianapolis this off-season after playing one season in the AFC East and getting a close glimpse at the onetime gold standard of two-tight-end sets—the Patriots' Rob Gronkowski and Aaron Hernandez. "[They caused] a lot of match-up problems," says Landry. "It's like having a fast guy such as Reggie Bush coming out of the backfield and having a linebacker cover him. Same thing with the tight ends, but they're big men who can block too."

A former Howard University quarterback, the 38-year-old Hamilton had been a position coach with the Jets, 49ers and Bears before joining Jim Harbaugh's Stanford staff as a receivers coach in 2010. When Harbaugh left for the 49ers and Stanford's then offensive coordinator David Shaw was elevated to head coach, Hamilton took over and ran an offense once described



by a Notre Dame football blogger as the "tight end-iest in the country." Luck says the new Colts playbook consists of roughly 75% of the plays he ran in his final season at Stanford, with slightly more emphasis on ground-and-pound.

As veteran wideout Reggie Wayne nears the end of his Hall of Fame career, Indianapolis desperately needs the run game to help bolster an erratic offense that took plenty of the sheen off Luck's rookie numbers. Wayne excluded, Colts wide receivers have some of the worst hands in the league. Luck's No. 2 and No. 3 targets in 2012, Donnie Avery and T.Y. Hilton, dropped 22 of 132 catchable balls, well above the norm for the position. Avery had the most trouble with deep balls, catching six of 25 attempts beyond 20 yards with four drops. Replacing Avery—who signed with the Chiefs in March—is free-agent addition Darrius Heyward-Bey, who has the speed to take the top off the defense, but whose catching skills regressed in '12 after three seasons of improvement.

Additionally, the Colts have one of the league's worst pass protection units, which only speaks more highly of Luck. According to Pro Football Focus, the Colts' pass blocking graded out worse than 30 teams in 2012, better than only the Cardinals'.

With so much riding on both Allen and Fleener to contribute in every facet of the offense, neither player feels as if he's in the position battle that was anticipated after last year's draft.

"In a sense we are competing," Fleener says. "But I don't think on a daily basis it's about trying to outdo each other. It's about getting better as a group. I think as long as the team's successful, there's going to be enough credit to go around." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- JAN. 18** Lose O coordinator Bruce Arians [ARI]; hire O coordinator Pep Hamilton [Stanford]  
**MARCH 12** Sign OT Gosder Cherilus [DET], LB Erik Walden [GB]  
**MARCH 13** Sign SS LaRon Landry [NYJ]; lose WR Donnie Avery [KC]  
**APRIL 2** Sign WR Darrius Heyward-Bey [OAK]  
**APRIL 25** Draft DE Bjoern Werner [Florida State]  
**MAY 18** Lose LB Dwight Freeney [SD]  
**JUNE 11** Sign RB Ahmad Bradshaw [NYG]

**ANALYSIS** In 2012, his first year in charge, G.M. Ryan Grigson remade his team with an eye toward youth. Now he's supplementing that. His post-Peyton Colts no longer pay a disproportionate percentage of team payroll to their QB; Andrew Luck will make just \$1.4 million this year. With the extra dough, Grigson aggressively targeted three veterans when the bell rang in free agency, spending liberally with conspicuous guarantees to Cherilus (\$16 million), Landry (\$14 million) and Walden (\$8 million). The result is a mix of targeted vets sprinkled among last year's youthful overachievers.

## THE CASE FOR...

### The running game

Despite having one of the NFL's most promising young QBs in Andrew Luck, the Colts are built to run the ball better than most teams. According to Pro Football Focus, each of the projected offensive line starters, plus TE Dwayne Allen, graded better in the ground game than in the passing attack in 2012. The left side in particular—traditionally the pass-essential blindside protectors—excelled on handoffs. Free-agent acquisition Donald Thomas, projected to start at left guard, has spent three of his five seasons in spread offenses—in New England and Detroit—but he was first put to use by the Dolphins, who in '09 rushed for 2,231 yards and 22 TDs behind the speedy, 6' 4" 306-pounder. Meanwhile, the anchor of a would-be run-heavy Colts offense is LT Anthony Castonzo (left), an '11 first-round pick who gave up a team-high 58 hits, hurries or sacks last year, but who was key in the Colts' gouging the Ravens for 152 rushing yards in a wild-card playoff game. Indy brass thinks that free-agent pickup Ahmad Bradshaw can be an every-down back based on his pass protection skills. If not, second-year between-the-tackles bruiser Vick Ballard gives coordinator Pep Hamilton the license to run wild. —R.K.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 11-5

- SEPT. 8** Oakland **15** Miami **22** at San Francisco **29** at Jacksonville  
**OCT. 6** Seattle **14** at San Diego [Mon] **20** Denver **27** BYE  
**NOV. 3** at Houston **10** St. Louis **14** at Tennessee [Thu] **24** at Arizona  
**DEC. 1** Tennessee **8** at Cincinnati **15** Houston **22** at Kansas City **29** Jacksonville

**SOFT SPOT** The Raiders and the Dolphins—Nos. 20 and 27, respectively, in pass D in '12—make an attractive opening to Year Two of the Luck era. And after a challenge from the Niners, Luck gets the Jags' 22nd-ranked secondary.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 10

#### QB ANDREW LUCK

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
339	54.1	4,374	23-18	76.5

#### RB VICK BALLARD

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
211	814	17	3

#### WR REGGIE WAYNE

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
106	1,355	12.8	5

### DEFENSE 2012 RANKING: 26

#### DT RICKY JEAN FRANCOIS (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
22	2	0

#### LB ROBERT MATHIS

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
33	8	1

#### SS LARON LANDRY (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
100	0	2

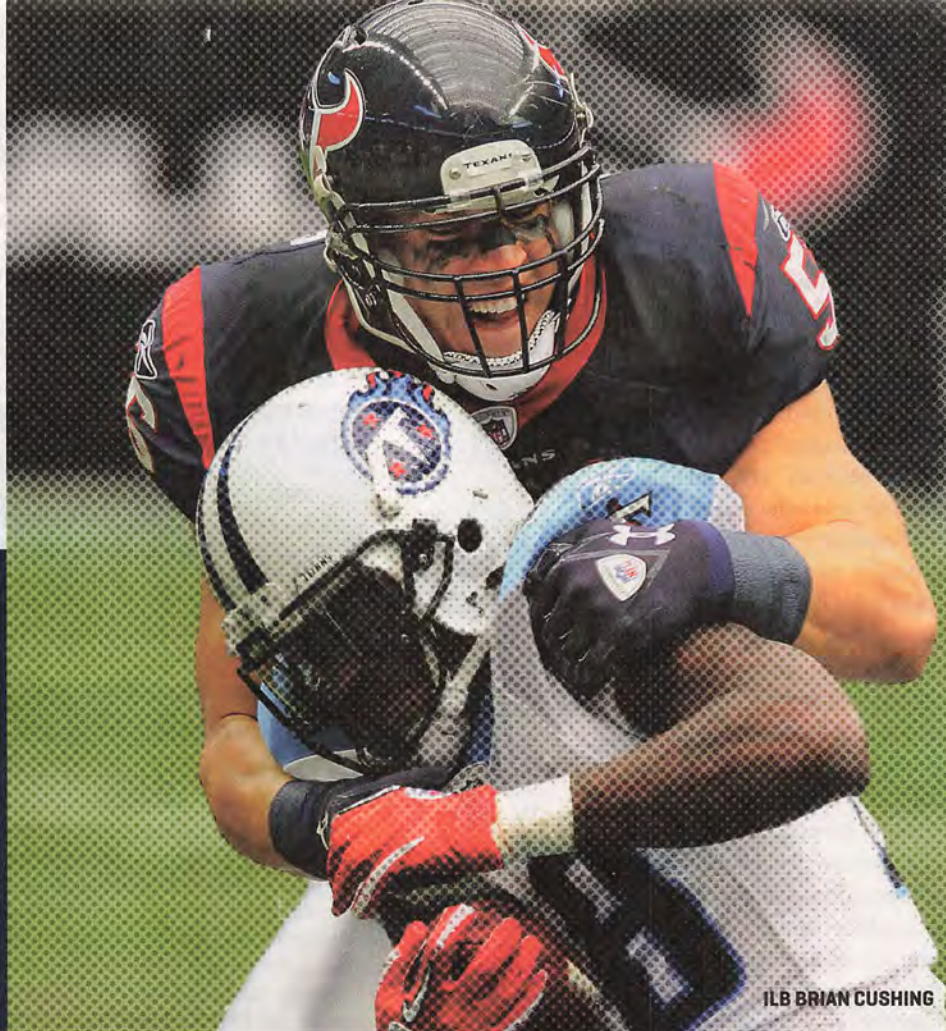
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ACQUISITION





## Houston TEXANS

# G



ILB BRIAN CUSHING

→ IN ONE OF linebacker Brian Cushing's first drills after a 10-month rehab for a torn left ACL, he was so jacked to be back on the field that he head-butted a teammate to celebrate a pass breakup. "Dude's ready to get after it," says fellow linebacker Brooks Reed.

Cushing's return will supercharge a unit that underachieved last season—even taking the rash of injuries it suffered into account. In the dastardly 3-4 scheme concocted by defensive coordinator/sorcerer Wade Phillips, the outside linebackers *must* get to the quarterback. But outside linebacker Connor Barwin, who had 11½ sacks in 2011, had just three last season, before signing with the Eagles in March. Reed's numbers also dipped, from six sacks two years ago to 2½.

So you can't blame Reed for wanting to mix things up. He's chopped several inches off his

Defensive Player of the Year J.J. Watt can't do *everything* for a D that underachieved last year. A rehabbed Brian Cushing will bolster an otherwise sad-sack pass rush

BY  
AUSTIN  
MURPHY

Thor-like mane, which now reaches the top of his shoulders, rather than covering them. During the season his hair "gets a little patchy," he reports, "'cause I got linemen ripping the s--- out of it."

NFL Defensive Player of the Year J.J. Watt is part of the reason the Houston linebackers' sack total dropped to 13 last season, from 26½ in 2011. When Phillips's scheme worked, and they found an open lane to the quarterback, Watt had usually gotten there first. The second-year end racked up an extraterrestrial 20½ sacks in '12. But Reed isn't offering that as an excuse—or the fact that he basically finished the season on one leg, after suffering a serious groin injury against the Lions on Thanksgiving Day.

After winning 11 of their first 12 games, the Texans lost their mojo—and three of their final four. Houston's secondary drew

plenty of criticism for giving up nine passing TDs, second-worst in the league during that stretch. Certainly, an absence of QB pressure was a big part of the problem. Houston was outscored 105-69 in those four games.

"People see numbers," says Reed. "And our sack numbers were lagging. This defense is designed for us to get sacks, so that's a big emphasis this year."

Help has arrived. Barwin will be replaced by second-year man Whitney Mercilus, whose six sacks as a rookie made him one of the few bright spots in the Texans' linebacking corps. Upon arriving at Illinois in 2008, Mercilus was informed that he was needed at tight end. "I told 'em I can't stand blocking," he recalls, "so they put me on the other side of the ball." With that surname—pronounced "merciless"—the man's *got* to play defense.



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- MARCH 12** Cut WR Kevin Walter  
**MARCH 13** Lose FS Glover Quin [DET]  
**MARCH 14** Lose LB Connor Barwin [PHI]  
**MARCH 22** Sign FS Ed Reed [BAL]  
**MARCH 23** Sign P Shane Lechler [OAK]  
**APRIL 15** Lose K Shayne Graham [CLE]  
**APRIL 25** Draft WR DeAndre Hopkins [Clemson], SS D.J. Swearinger [South Carolina]

**ANALYSIS** Reed—who's still recuperating from hip surgery and only playing at partial power—brings gravitas to a team that's been ticketed the past several seasons as ready to take the next step, only to fall early in the postseason. Although signed for three years, his \$6 million guarantee all pays out in 2013, and at age 34 he's most likely a short-term play. The Texans similarly felt there was peak performance left in Lechler despite his age [37] and steep decline in '12. Hopkins has been the talk of camp; he's a wise investment if he thrives opposite Andre Johnson, as expected. Barwin's loss puts added pressure on J.J. Watt to replicate his Defensive Player of the Year performance.

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-

## THE CASE FOR...

### Wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins

Andre Johnson didn't mind that he had a shadow in training camp. Hopkins, the Clemson wideout who was drafted 27th by the Texans, spent much of the preseason observing his elder, a six-time Pro Bowler, emulating him and peppering him with questions. How did he take care of his body? What's the deal with Johnson's prepractice training room routine? "He always wants to know what everything is for," says Johnson. "He'll see me exercising and be like, 'What does that do? What does this do?' He wants to learn. That's what I love about him." Johnson is also going to love the space Hopkins opens up for him. Hopkins has the ability to make opposing D's pay if they double-team the veteran. He's 6' 1", 207, but plays bigger, as demonstrated by his twisting, levitating, 34-yard TD catch against the Vikings in the preseason. His hands are giant [he favors red XXXL gloves]. And he finds himself in an ideal situation: the No. 2 WR playing opposite a future Hall of Famer. Which isn't to say 'Dre doesn't feel the occasional need to bring the rook down a peg. After that Vikings game, Hopkins recalls, "He told me, 'It's one touchdown, don't get overexcited.'" —A.M.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 12-4

**SEPT. 9** at San Diego [Mon] **15** Tennessee **22** at Baltimore **29** Seattle  
**OCT. 6** at San Francisco **13** St. Louis **20** at Kansas City **27** BYE  
**NOV. 3** Indianapolis **10** at Arizona **17** Oakland **24** Jacksonville  
**DEC. 1** New England **5** at Jacksonville [Thu] **15** at Indianapolis **22** Denver **29** at Tennessee

**DANGER ZONE** One of just two teams that visit both Super Bowl participants (the other: Green Bay), Houston also gets the emergent Seahawks during the week between. Such is the cruel reward for a division crown.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 7

**QB MATT SCHAUB**

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
350	64.3	4,008	22-12	90.7

**RB ARIAN FOSTER**

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
351	1,424	40	17

**WR ANDRE JOHNSON**

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
112	1,598	14.3	4

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 7

**DE J.J. WATT**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
81	20½	0

**DE ANTONIO SMITH**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
30	7	0

**SS DANIEAL MANNING**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
77	1	2

The oft-injured Darryl Sharpton will play inside, at the position Phillips calls "Mo." Sharpton missed time in training camp with a strained groin but seems to have returned to full health. "If he can stay in one piece he can really help this team," says coach Gary Kubiak. The Texans hedged themselves against the possibility of Sharpton breaking down again by signing street free agent Joe Mays in late July. It was Mays, then playing for the Broncos, who hit Texans quarterback Matt Schaub so hard in a game last Sept. 23 that Schaub's helmet was ripped off, taking a piece of the quarterback's ear with it.

Two weeks after that, the team lost its emotional leader when Jets guard Matt Slauson chopped Cushing's left knee from behind with a "peel-back block" of the sort that has since been outlawed by the league. "I feel like I add more than just my physical presence," says Cushing. "I add a lot emotionally. I bring a lot of fire."

The fire is back. After rehabbing like a madman—the comebacks of Adrian Peterson and Jamaal Charles "helped me see that it could be done," he says—Cushing's left knee and leg are stronger than they were before. Forced to play "Mo" last year, he is back at his accustomed "Mike" spot. "Now, he's on the same side as J.J.," says Phillips with a grin. "That's going to give some teams a few problems, with those two together over there."

Yes, Kubiak and Phillips kept the reins on him during training camp, but that was out of caution, rather than necessity. "I'm going to slowly build my way into this camp," Cushing said on Aug. 1. "But when the time rolls around, on September 9, I will be firing on all cylinders."

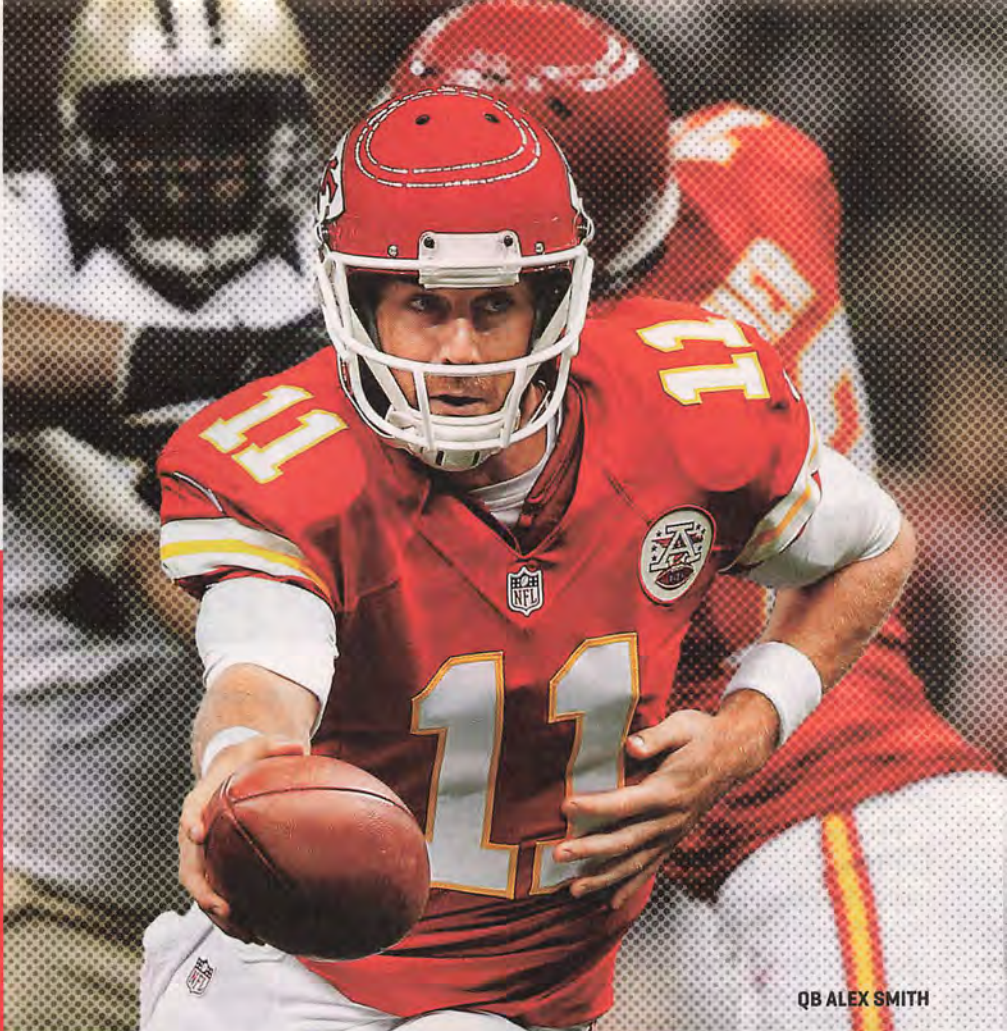
Sounds like the mojo is back. □





A

## Kansas City CHIEFS



QB ALEX SMITH

→ RUMORS THAT Alex Smith was leaving San Francisco had been buzzing around the league for weeks in early 2013. When the Chiefs' trade for Smith finally became official on March 12, coach Andy Reid wasted no time calling.

His first words to the veteran quarterback? "Can you still run 22 Z In?"

**22 Z In (noun):** A pass play and staple of the West Coast offense in which one wide receiver runs a post pattern opposite the other's 12-yard curl, the tight end runs a short cross over the middle, the fullback runs a swing route as the hot receiver and the quarterback, after taking a five-step drop, throws quickly to his best, and deepest, open option. The kind of ball-control play a West Coast quarterback often uses on first down when the defense, seeing a two-back set, expects a run.

*In a city that's all about the sauce, the Chiefs hope their new coach and quarterback can add some much-needed flavor. The name of the secret sauce? 22 Z In*

+  
**BY  
PETER  
KING**

"Oh yeah," Smith replied. "Of course."

And so begins a happy marriage, a shotgun wedding (pun intended) between Reid, a coach who was run out of Philadelphia after 14 seasons, and a former No. 1 overall pick who was benched in San Francisco after eight rocky seasons. The relationship between these two Southern Californians, both grounded in Bill Walsh's West Coast offense, will be the key to whether Kansas City can make a quick turnaround after last season's 2-14 nightmare.

One of the strangest sights in training camp this summer was Reid—whose nickname is Big Red because of his short red locks—donning the Chiefs' red and white. After talking to the coach and those close to him, however, you get the feeling that he is glad to be out of Philadelphia and away from the day-to-day responsibili-

ties of also being the executive vice president of football operations for an NFL team.

"I love coaching, and that's what I'm doing here," Reid said in his Chiefs training camp dorm at Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph, Mo. "It's the fun part of the game to me. Change can be good, and I know this change is very good for me."

Added Smith, "The thing that I've noticed from Day One is how much he loves teaching and coaching, both in the classroom and on the field. It sends a great energy to the whole organization."

Big Red maintains that he twice tried to trade for Smith while coaching the Eagles—including once when he was in the process of signing Michael Vick to add to the Donovan McNabb-Kevin Kolb mix in 2009. Reid was always impressed with Smith's skill set,



even though the QB doesn't have a good, deep arm. He liked Smith's football smarts and his ability to learn so many offenses in his time in San Francisco.

"I was there eight years," says Smith. "But it was only the last two years that we ran the same offense in consecutive seasons. So that's seven coordinators in eight years. It's why when I came here, it was really something I was used to, getting a new offense down. And this is the offense I've always loved."

Reid wants Smith to be the quarterback he was during the first nine games of 2012—when he ranked third in passer rating (104.1). Back then he had been a chains-mover, a West Coast tactician spreading the field, taking exactly what the defense gave him. Still, one of the criticisms of Smith during his time with the 49ers was that he was Mr. Checkdown, perfectly happy to take the dump-off to the hot receiver and gain six yards, even when a key receiver like Michael Crabtree might have a step on a cornerback flying up the right. In the 22 Z In, Smith will have more passing options with his backs coming out of the backfield, instead of just letting it fly for the wideout on the post route.

Despite the criticism, Smith's yards-per-attempt average last year was noteworthy: 7.97 yards per pass. That's better than Aaron Rodgers (7.78), Drew Brees (7.73), Matt Ryan (7.67) and Tom Brady (7.58). "I feel like I've been handed the keys to the car," says Smith. "I love the trust and opportunity that they've given me here. I really appreciate it and realize that it's no time to get complacent. I'm in the place I want to be. I don't want to give those keys up."

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- DEC. 31** Fire coach Romeo Crennel  
**JAN. 4** Hire coach Andy Reid (PHI); fire G.M. Scott Pioli  
**JAN. 11** Hire O coordinator Doug Pederson (PHI), D coordinator Bob Sutton (NYJ)  
**JAN. 12** Hire G.M. John Dorsey (GB)  
**MARCH 4** Re-sign WR Dwayne Bowe  
**MARCH 12** Trade for QB Alex Smith (SF)  
**MARCH 13** Sign CB Dunta Robinson (ATL), TE Anthony Fasano (MIA); lose DE Glenn Dorsey (SF)  
**APRIL 25** Draft OT Eric Fisher (Central Michigan), TE Travis Kelce (Cincinnati)

**ANALYSIS** The Chiefs bucked the trend of chasing a hot young coach, hiring the proven Reid within days of his firing; Reid then turned around and immediately lured Dorsey from Green Bay in a pairing they had discussed for years. Under Reid's watch, Smith, who lost his 49ers job simply by following concussion protocol, should be rejuvenated. With the new QB, Robinson and Fasano—all aggressive strikes early in free agency—as well as six holdover Pro Bowlers last year, this underachieving team from 2012 can take a big leap forward.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Coach Andy Reid

After the Chiefs stumbled to a four-year, 23–42 stretch under G.M. Scott Pioli, owner Clark Hunt fired Pioli and coach Romeo Crennel and looked to build a bridge with a crestfallen fan base. If you survive as a coach for 14 years in Philadelphia without winning a Super Bowl, as Reid did, you're either a masochist or a diplomatic genius. Or both. Probably both. But this is a back-to-the-future job for Reid. The Eagles had won nine games in the two seasons before his arrival in 1999, and he promised a long-term program that players would need to fit into. Philly won 140 games in 14 years. These Chiefs won nine in the last two years. Reid will teach a new way, but he will have to motivate players that previous coaches struggled with—OT Branden Albert, for instance, and WR Dwayne Bowe. He will get to do that with a QB in whom he believes, and without the burden of personnel control that he carried for the last 14 years in Philly. He also gets to do it in a place far less feral than Philadelphia. "I've never heard a coach say he didn't enjoy coaching in this city," says Reid. The honeymoon's on—for a year or two, at least.

—P.K.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 2–14

**SEPT. 8** at Jacksonville **15** Dallas **19** at Philadelphia (Thu) **29** New York Giants  
**OCT. 6** at Tennessee **13** Oakland **20** Houston **27** Cleveland  
**NOV. 3** at Buffalo **10** BYE **17** at Denver **24** San Diego  
**DEC. 1** Denver **8** at Washington **15** at Oakland **22** Indianapolis **29** at San Diego

**SOFT SPOT** The good news: This chunk includes four of the AFC's seven worst teams in 2012. The bad news: Kansas City was worse than all of them. If the Chiefs hope to escape the basement, this is the window.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 Rank: 24

**QB ALEX SMITH (N)**  
 COMP PCT YARDS TD-INT RATING  
 153 70.2 1,737 13–5 104.1

**RB JAMAAL CHARLES**  
 ATT YARDS REC TTD  
 285 1,509 35 6

**WR DWAYNE BOWE**  
 REC YARDS AVG TTD  
 59 801 13.6 3

### DEFENSE 2012 Rank: 20

**LB DERRICK JOHNSON**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 125 2 0

**LB TAMBA HALL**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 51 9 0

**CB BRANDON FLOWERS**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 48 1 3

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION





+

Buffalo  
**BILLS**

8



QB EJ MANUEL



THERE WAS fresh optimism this summer at St. John Fisher College, the site of the Bills' training camp. It was based on the belief that the 2013 team will look nothing like the '12 version. "I expect our offense to be explosive," says top receiver Stevie Johnson, "not as stagnant as we were in the past."

The organization remade itself this off-season with a new G.M., new coach, new offense—and a new quarterback.

Eight seasons without a winning record meant overhauling the most important position on the field. Ryan Fitzpatrick started 53 games for Buffalo from 2009 through '12, but Bills brass cut the signal-caller in March, releasing him with five years left on the six-year, \$59 million extension (\$24 million of it guaranteed) he signed two years ago. The team started over with a two-part plan: They signed vet-

Investing in a new franchise quarterback to run a new up-tempo offense is cause for renewed optimism. There's talent here, and maybe a good sleeper pick too

+

**BY  
JENNY  
VRENTAS**

eran free agent Kevin Kolb to a two-year, \$6.1 million contract with playing-time incentives and selected strong-armed, versatile EJ Manuel (Florida State) with the 16th pick in April's draft. Then they let the two QBs compete.

Many of the pieces are in place for a turnaround. On defense the Bills are installing a new look under former Jets defensive coordinator Mike Pettine, who wants to run the multiple-front attacking scheme he learned under New York coach Rex Ryan. That complex package of blitzes will put pressure on a secondary that has one shutdown corner, Stephon Gilmore (when he returns from a hand injury), but also a lot of other, lesser players who will have to learn quickly.

On offense Johnson has surpassed 1,000 receiving yards in each of the past three seasons, and fourth-year veteran C.J. Spiller has become one of the league's most

explosive running backs, averaging 6.0 yards per carry in 2012 and establishing himself as an elite weapon in the passing game as well as on the ground. The Bills also drafted a pair of receivers in the second and third rounds, and both look ready to contribute: Robert Woods from USC and speedster Marquise Goodwin from Texas.

But Buffalo's future hinges on a quarterback capable of running new coach Doug Marrone's up-tempo offense. With Manuel running the show—and he almost certainly will once he recovers from a preseason knee injury—there are numerous possibilities: some spread to leverage the team's depth at wide receiver and Spiller's dual-threat excellence in space, perhaps even some read-option to take advantage of Manuel's size (6' 5", 240 pounds) and dexterity. Manuel impressed the coaching staff with his deep, steady throws and his coolly ex-





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#### IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION FOR HUMALOG

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- Do not change the insulin you use without talking to your healthcare provider. Doses of oral antidiabetic medicines may also need to change if your insulin is changed.
- Test your blood sugar levels as your healthcare provider instructs.
- When used in a pump, do not mix Humalog with any other insulin or liquid.

##### Who should not take Humalog?

- Do not take Humalog if your blood sugar is too low (hypoglycemia) or if you are allergic to insulin lispro or any of the ingredients in Humalog.

##### Before using Humalog, what should I tell my healthcare providers?

Tell your healthcare providers:

- About all of your medical conditions, including liver, kidney, or heart problems.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- About all the medicines you take, including prescription (especially ones commonly called TZDs [thiazolidinediones]) and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

##### How should I use Humalog?

- Humalog is a rapid-acting insulin. Take Humalog within fifteen minutes before eating or right after eating a meal.
- Always make sure you receive the correct type of Humalog from the pharmacy.
- Do not use Humalog if it is cloudy, colored, or has solid particles or clumps in it.
- Do not mix Humalog with insulin other than NPH when using a syringe. Do not mix or dilute Humalog when used in a pump.
- Inject Humalog under your skin (subcutaneously). Never inject into a vein or muscle. Change (rotate) your injection site with each dose. Make sure you inject the correct insulin and dose.
- Depending on the type of diabetes you have, you may need to take Humalog with a longer-acting insulin or with oral antidiabetic medicines.
- If you forget to take your dose of Humalog, your blood sugar may go too high (hyperglycemia), which can lead to serious problems like loss of consciousness (passing out), coma, or even death.
- Your insulin dose may need to change because of illness, stress, other medicines you take, change in diet, or change in physical activity or exercise.

##### What are the possible side effects of Humalog?

- Low blood sugar is the most common side effect. There are many causes of low blood sugar, including taking too much Humalog. It is important to treat it quickly. You can treat mild to moderate low blood sugar by drinking or eating a quick source of sugar right away.

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If severe, low blood sugar can cause unconsciousness (passing out), seizures, and death. Symptoms may be different for each person. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about low blood sugar symptoms and treatment.

- Severe life-threatening allergic reactions (whole-body reactions) can happen. Get medical help right away if you develop a rash over your whole body, have trouble breathing, have a fast heartbeat, or are sweating.
- Reactions at the injection site (local allergic reaction) such as redness, swelling, and itching can happen. If you keep having skin reactions or they are serious, talk to your healthcare provider. Do not inject insulin into a skin area that is red, swollen, or itchy.
- Skin may thicken or pit at the injection site (lipodystrophy). Do not inject insulin into skin with these types of changes.
- Other side effects include low potassium in your blood (hypokalemia), and weight gain.
- Serious side effects can include:
  - swelling of your hands and feet
  - heart failure when taking certain pills called thiazolidinediones or "TZDs" with Humalog. This may occur in some people even if they have not had heart problems before. Tell your healthcare provider if you have shortness of breath, swelling of your ankles or feet, or sudden weight gain, which may be symptoms of heart failure. Your healthcare provider may need to adjust or stop your treatment with TZDs or Humalog.
- These are not all of the possible side effects. Ask your healthcare providers for more information or for medical advice about side effects.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch) or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

##### How should I store Humalog?

- Unopened Humalog should be stored in a refrigerator and can be used until the expiration date on the carton or label.
- Humalog should be stored away from light and heat. Do not use insulin if it has been frozen.
- Opened vials should be kept at room temperature or in a refrigerator. Opened cartridges or prefilled pens should be kept at room temperature.
- Once opened, Humalog vials, prefilled pens, and cartridges should be thrown away after 28 days.

Humalog is available by prescription only.

**For additional information, talk to your healthcare providers and please see Information for Patients on following pages. Please see Instructions for Use that accompany your pen.**

HI CON ISI 29MAR2013



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*Lilly*



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Read the "Patient Information" that comes with Humalog (HU-ma-log) before you start using it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This leaflet does not take the place of talking with your healthcare provider about your diabetes or treatment. If you have questions about Humalog or diabetes, talk with your healthcare provider.

### **What is Humalog?**

Humalog is an injectable, rapid-acting, man-made insulin. It is used to treat people with diabetes for the control of high blood sugar. You should take Humalog within fifteen minutes before eating or right after eating a meal.

### **What is the most important information I should know about Humalog?**

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- You must test your blood sugar levels as your healthcare provider instructs.
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- Do not mix Humalog with insulin other than NPH when using a syringe.
- Inject Humalog under your skin (subcutaneously). Never inject into a vein or muscle. Change (rotate) your injection site with each dose. Make sure you inject the correct insulin and dose.
- When used in a pump, do not mix Humalog with any other insulin or liquid. The infusion set should be changed at least every 3 days. The Humalog in the pump reservoir should be changed at least every 7 days even if you have not used all of the Humalog.
- Taking other medicines known as TZDs (thiazolidinediones) with Humalog may cause heart failure. Tell your healthcare provider if you have any new or worse symptoms of heart failure, such as shortness of breath, swelling of your ankles or feet, or sudden weight gain.

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#### **Do not take Humalog:**

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- before checking with your healthcare provider regarding any allergies you may have to its ingredients.

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- Once opened, Humalog vials, prefilled pens, and cartridges should be thrown away after 28 days.

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ecuted two-minute drive at the end of the first half of Buffalo's first preseason game, on Aug. 11, a 44-20 win over Indianapolis. Manuel led the offense 92 yards to a touchdown, completing all nine of his passes on the drive, including a 17-yard scoring strike over the middle to tight end Dorin Dickerson.

As in any fast-paced offense, there is a premium on decision-making, and Johnson sees the necessary attributes in Manuel, whom he notes has done well at calling audibles, reading coverages and directing teammates. "We are going so fast, and pieces are all over the place, so if you have a guy back there like, 'I'm a rookie; I don't know,' it's not going to work," says Johnson. "[E] has taken over that role as the communicator, and I'm happy to see that from him."

But how long before Marrone can use Manuel in a regular-season game? That remains up in the air. Either way, the Bills' offense will enter the season still a work in progress. The first-team offense has missed important preseason reps with both Manuel and Kolb, who missed the first exhibition game after tweaking his knee and left the third with a serious concussion.

You have to rewind 13 years to find the last Bills offense that ranked among the NFL's top 10. Last season's group was in the bottom half of the league in most categories: 21.5 points and 342.9 yards per game; a total of seven pass plays of 40 yards or more.

"Playoffs, a winning season—that's what's riding on this," says Johnson. "We need that leader, that quarterback leader. We can't go anywhere if our head is cut off."

They're going somewhere—maybe not to the playoffs, maybe not *this* year. But at least the direction is forward. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B



\*IN TORONTO

(R) ROOKIE—  
COLLEGE STATS

## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>JAN. 7</b>	Hire coach Doug Marrone (Syracuse)
<b>JAN. 9</b>	Hire D coordinator Mike Pettine (NYJ), O coordinator Nathaniel Hackett (Syracuse)
<b>MARCH 1</b>	Franchise FS Jairus Byrd
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Cut QB Ryan Fitzpatrick
<b>APRIL 8</b>	Sign QB Kevin Kolb (ARI)
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft QB EJ Manuel (Florida St.), WR Robert Woods (USC)
<b>MAY 16</b>	Promote Doug Whaley to G.M.

**ANALYSIS** If we're to believe the adage about continuity as a key to success, the Bills—with a new G.M., coach, QB and offensive and defensive schemes—have a ways to go. In the meantime they're paying the price for change, releasing players with large guarantees (Fitzpatrick, Mark Anderson and Tarvaris Jackson, who pocketed \$500,000 for a few months in the off-season). That's money that could have gone to re-signing their best player, Byrd, who—frustrated by the lack of a long-term deal—sat out most of camp before signing his franchise tender. Buffalo hopes that a new era of continuity begins now.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Running back C.J. Spiller

Only two starting backs averaged six or more yards per carry last season. One was MVP Adrian Peterson. The other was Spiller, who has shared the Bills' backfield with Fred Jackson since being drafted in the first round in 2010 and who had his most productive pro season (1,703 all-purpose yards on 250 total touches) after Jackson went down with a right-knee injury last fall. Spiller's spotty use by former coach Chan Gailey was a seasonlong story line in '12, but new coordinator Nathaniel Hackett has already made it clear that he will give Spiller the ball "until he throws up." Spiller's explosiveness and versatility fit the up-tempo system that Hackett and coach Doug Marrone brought to Buffalo, and a strong ground game is an important security blanket for a team breaking in a new quarterback. Jackson will still have a role in the backfield, but he'll likely transition into Spiller's complement. In '12, Spiller was the NFL's eighth-leading rusher, despite his part-time deployment; the seven backs who ranked ahead of him had anywhere from 78 to 144 more carries. If the Bills follow their plan to feed him, his totals from last season could end up being just a starting point. —J.V.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 6-10

**SEPT. 8** New England **15** Carolina **22** at New York Jets **29** Baltimore  
**OCT. 3** at Cleveland [Thu] **13** Cincinnati **20** at Miami **27** at New Orleans  
**NOV. 3** Kansas City **10** at Pittsburgh **17** New York Jets **24** BYE  
**DEC. 1** Atlanta\* **8** at Tampa Bay **15** at Jacksonville **22** Miami **29** at New England

**SOFT SPOT** Just as winter weather descends, the Chiefs and the Jets (8-24 in '12 combined) come to town, a chance for some holiday cheer. Heading to Heinz Field won't be fun, but you know what they say: Bills can't be choosers.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 19

**QB EJ MANUEL (R)**

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
263	68.0	3,392	23-10	156.1

**RB C.J. SPILLER**

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
207	1,244	43	8

**WR STEVIE JOHNSON**

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
79	1,046	13.2	6

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 22

**DE MARIO WILLIAMS**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
46	10½	0

**DT KYLE WILLIAMS**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
46	5	0

**FS JAIRUS BYRD**

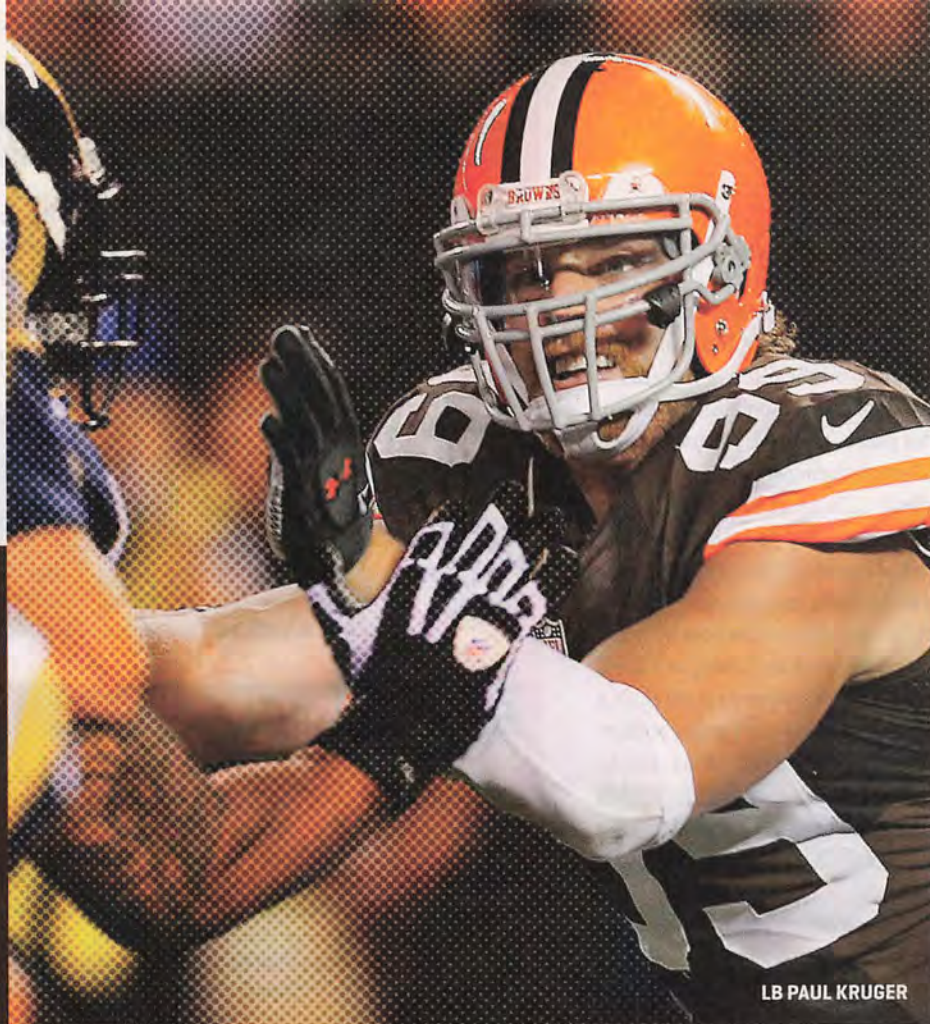
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
76	0	5





## Cleveland BROWNS

# 9



LB PAUL KRUGER

→ SINCE THE Browns were reborn in Cleveland, in 1999, the best month for the team has usually been August. *Tim Couch really looks like a playoff quarterback in camp this year. . . . Finally we've got big-time weapons in Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow. . . . Glad we're going back to ground and pound—this Peyton Hillis is unstoppable!*

This year there's a more pragmatic sense of *We're on the right track; this isn't our year, and we're dubious about our QB, but our D can still punch some people in the mouth.*

First there was the administration change. New owner Jimmy Haslam saw out president Mike Holmgren, G.M. Tom Heckert and coach Pat Shurmur. Enter CEO Joe Banner, G.M. Mike Lombardi and coach Rob Chudzinski. That group's biggest decision was to stick with Brandon Weeden—the NFL's 29th-rated passer as a rookie—but

Patience is the play in Cleveland—heard that one before?—even with a restocked defense that should live up to the AFC North's absurdly high standards

+

**BY  
PETER  
KING**

when Banner speaks about the future, you get the feeling he's got his QB in mind when he says, "I think about the parts of the team that we know aren't ready; at the end of the season we're going to have work to do on our roster. We aren't sure yet where all those spots are."

**The Browns are going to have to win a few 17-13 and 12-10 games in 2013 in order to take the Leap.**

Trent Richardson is a potential game-turner who can run powerfully between the tackles. But unless Weeden plays significantly better than he did a year ago—and with a two-game suspension for his top weapon, wideout Josh Gordon, he won't start with a full deck—Richardson won't be able to carry the attack by himself. The run defenses of all three division rivals are just too good, and in the hypercompetitive AFC North, 7-9 is probably the best fans can hope for.

But it should be a competitive

7-9. Defense is the common denominator in the division, and the Browns have a top 10 D, a unit with few weaknesses outside the corner opposite Joe Haden, where the untested Buster Skrine and Chris Owens are battling for a job.

Well under the cap, the Browns plowed their dollars into their defense, investing \$19.2 million to significantly upgrade a pass-rush that averaged just 2.4 sacks per game last season. Free agent Desmond Bryant, a 310-pound interior disrupter, was a loss that pained Raiders G.M. Reggie McKenzie; and the Browns got themselves a nickel pass-rush with the additions of free-agent Paul Kruger and first-round choice Barkevious Mingo, from LSU. Kruger led the Ravens with nine sacks last year, but he's not a natural run-stopper and requires a bookend to be effective. He will get that complement in Mingo, whose college numbers didn't re-



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flect his value. His body type and outside speed remind evaluators of Aldon Smith, who had a 14-sack rookie year with the Niners in 2011.

Anyone who witnessed an afternoon training session this August understands why the front office was fixated on Mingo, the best rookie I saw in camp this year. Twice in one 11-on-11 drill he blew by the left tackle and got to the QB; later he powered through the tackle-guard gap with a swim move, disrupting the play in the backfield. Once he returns from a bruised lung, Mingo may play only as a nickel rusher, but if he makes an impact there, it will be enough. "Great instincts for a young player," says linebacker D'Qwell Jackson, whose own pass-rush should be improved by two tough edge guys. "Barkevious bats down a lot of balls. We need two good rushers, and I think we've got them now."

Jackson also touched on the philosophy of new coordinator Ray Horton. Last season, as Arizona's coordinator, Horton blitzed on 47% of opponents' passing plays, the second-highest rate for any team and well above the 32% NFL average. **In 2013, Jackson says he expects the Browns might bring blitzers on 30 snaps a game, which would be a significant increase from their average of 22 in '12.**

"I've played with a lot of good defensive players here," says Jackson, "but this year we've got enough of them to be great. There's logic to [Horton's blitzes]; every guy's capable of making a play at any time."

Traditional division kingpins Baltimore and Pittsburgh have that mentality: Don't wait for the offense to win the game; we can win on the other side of the ball. The Cleveland defense will steal a few games too. It won't be enough to overcome the shortcomings of the offense, but it's a start. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>DEC. 31</b>	Fire coach Pat Shurmur, G.M. Tom Heckert
<b>JAN. 10</b>	Hire coach Rob Chudzinski [CAR]
<b>JAN. 17</b>	Hire O coordinator Norv Turner [SD]
<b>JAN. 18</b>	Hire D coordinator Ray Horton [ARI], G.M. Michael Lombardi
<b>JAN. 28</b>	Fire D coordinator Dick Jauron
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Sign LB Paul Kruger [BAL]
<b>MARCH 13</b>	Sign DT Desmond Bryant [OAK]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft LB Barkevious Mingo [LSU], CB Leon McFadden [San Diego State]
<b>MAY 16</b>	Lose WR Josh Cribbs [OAK]

**ANALYSIS** With a complete management overhaul, you knew the Browns would come out blazing—and they did. The Kruger and Bryant deals were aggressive plays in a depressed free-agent market. And although Chudzinski was second choice behind Oregon's Chip Kelly, Turner and Horton were in high demand as coordinators and should pay immediate dividends. CEO Joe Banner and Lombardi took several prudent steps, shedding some of the bloat left over from the previous regime and setting a new path in Cleveland.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Offensive coordinator Norv Turner

When the Browns talked to Rob Chudzinski about their coaching job this off-season and he mentioned that if he got the gig, he'd bring along Turner as his offensive coordinator, Cleveland brass was impressed but skeptical. So Chudzinski called Turner, who confirmed that he'd be fine answering to someone else. That, Cleveland execs thought, was a feat—because of all the offensive minds out there, Turner had the best pedigree in coaching up young passers. Turner's task is clear and daunting: make a winning QB out of Brandon Weeden. Troy Aikman often said that his career would have been significantly diminished without Turner's tutoring. **As Weeden's mentor, Turner is working on limiting the number of passes that the 29-year-old has batted down (as a rookie in 2012 he had an NFL-high 21) and on improving his vision in the shotgun.** Turner, who also tutored Philip Rivers to major success, is the best hope of getting Weeden to think faster and smarter. But it's a big job. Early in camp, Weeden stared down a receiver, and two linemen got their paws on the pass. Turner clapped his hands, as if to say, You can't do that! Weeden knows. The classroom work will last all season. —P.K.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 5-11

**SEPT. 8** Miami **15** at Baltimore **22** at Minnesota **29** Cincinnati  
**OCT. 3** Buffalo (Thu) **13** Detroit **20** at Green Bay **27** at Kansas City  
**NOV. 3** Baltimore **10** BYE **17** at Cincinnati **24** Pittsburgh  
**DEC. 1** Jacksonville **8** at New England **15** Chicago **22** at New York Jets **29** at Pittsburgh

**SOFT SPOT** Even better than hosting three straight games: hosting one of them on a Thursday night. Home teams have won 44 of the 71 Thursday matchups since the NFL added late-season midweek games, in 2006.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 25

QB BRANDON WEEDEN					
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING	
297	57.4	3,385	14-17	72.6	

### RB TRENT RICHARDSON

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
267	950	51	12

### WR JOSH GORDON

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
50	805	16.1	5

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 23

LB D'QWELL JACKSON			
TACKLES	SACKS	INT	
119	3½	2	

### LB PAUL KRUGER (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
42	9	1

### CB JOE HADEN

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
51	0	3





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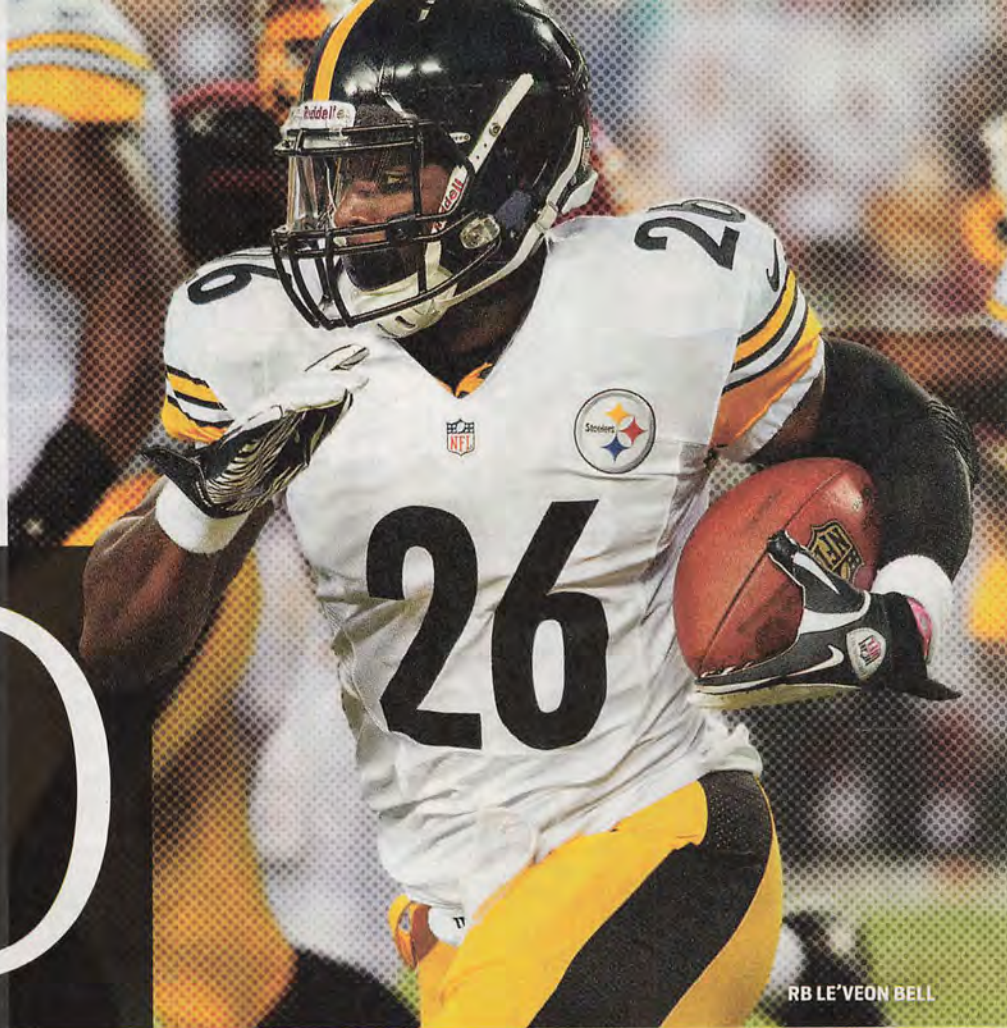






Pittsburgh  
**STEELERS**

# 10



RB LE'VEON BELL

→ FOR A running back who made jumping over opponents his YouTube signature at Michigan State, there really wasn't much for Le'Veon Bell to hurdle when he arrived in Pittsburgh this spring. The Steelers' running game, a consistent strength not long ago, has atrophied, which explains why the second-round pick found no entrenched starter in his path.

Jonathan Dwyer's meager 623 rushing yards led the Steelers' ground attack in 2012, **the lowest total for Pittsburgh's top back since 1991, when Merrill Hoge had 610.** Four other backs received at least 25 carries last year, but injuries and ineffectiveness resulted in the running game tumbling all the way to 26th in the NFL. As a team the 8-8 Steelers rushed for 1,537 yards, their fewest since 2003.

Those stats drew to an end the Rashard Mendenhall era and the

In the midst of an identity crisis, the Steelers returned to their roots by drafting Le'Veon Bell, who should be a classic man of Steel—just as soon as that foot heals

BY  
DON  
BANKS

identification, early in the scouting process, of an antidote to last year's committee: Bell, the 6' 1", 244-pound Spartan who slashed, jumped and plowed his way to 1,793 yards and 12 TDs on a hearty 382 totes as a junior last year.

**"We're not going to win enough games running the way we did last year,"** says second-year offensive coordinator Todd Haley. "Everything had to be perfect to make three or four yards. No fault to any one person, but it had to get better."

Bell was the front-runner for the starting job from the beginning of camp (Dwyer, Isaac Redman, LaRod Stephens-Howling and Felix Jones remain relief options), and that didn't change when Bell went down last week with a mid-foot sprain. He's expected to return—as the starter—in mid-September, at which point he'll need to get up to speed quickly. Ben Roethlisberger remains a top 10 QB, but his options are far less enticing

with the departure of Mike Wallace. Expect to see shorter drops and more precision routes when Pittsburgh throws. Expect, too, to see more running behind a young, strong offensive line that is built to bulldoze.

"Pittsburgh's a downhill team that likes to run," says Bell. "It fits my style to a tee. With Ben [Roethlisberger] making plays in the passing game, he just needs somebody to make a few running. I want to prove [the team] made the right choice."

It sure seemed like the right choice in camp, where Bell earned the respect of new teammates by holding his own in the "backs-on-backers" drill, in which a running back stands stationary in the pocket and tries to pick up a blitzing linebacker. Coach Mike Tomlin didn't take it easy on the rookie in his first taste of the drill, repeatedly sending pass rushers like veteran LaMarr Woodley his way.

"You want to see how they re-



spond to failure," Tomlin says of the exercise. "How they fight and how they come back is a window [into] what they're going to be."

What are the Steelers hoping Bell will be? That rare rookie who can handle being a three-down back, leaving no confusion about the new backfield pecking order. So far Bell—described by my colleague Peter King as the second-best rookie he saw in camp, behind the Browns' linebacker Barkevious Mingo—has shown good hands and a willingness to improve his blitz pick-up, sorting out traffic in the pocket and identifying where a block must be thrown. But it's his knack for falling forward that is most appealing.

"In this league, there aren't many open areas," says Steelers G.M. Kevin Colbert, "but [Bell] can turn a one-yard hole into a five-yard run. He did that consistently in college in an NFL-style offense. If you do that in the NFL, you're going to have a good career."

Pittsburgh's line is young and struggles with pass protection, but it can mash—especially left tackle Mike Adams, center Maurkice Pouncey and right guard David DeCastro—and it's well-suited to a renewed emphasis on running. The Steelers last season had just eight runs of at least 20 yards, and eight rushing touchdowns; but Bell's blend of vision and explosiveness has Pouncey, the team's best lineman and one of the game's top centers, excited about the prospect of more.

"Some people come in and really can't handle the pressure, but he seems like one of those rookies who can," says Pouncey. "I can't wait to see it [in the regular season]. We're all pumped up about what he can bring."

And Bell bringing it is just the thing the Steelers need to return to the postseason discussion. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



\*IN LONDON

## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- MARCH 9** Cut LB James Harrison
- MARCH 12** Lose WR Mike Wallace [MIA]
- MARCH 13** Cut OG Willie Colon; lose RB Rashard Mendenhall [ARI]
- APRIL 14** Re-sign WR Emmanuel Sanders
- APRIL 18** Re-sign NT Steve McLendon, RB Isaac Redman
- APRIL 25** Draft LB Jarvis Jones [Georgia], RB Le'Veon Bell [Michigan State]
- AUG. 23** Trade for RB Felix Jones [PHI]

**ANALYSIS** No NFL team has mortgaged more contracts in recent years to achieve short-term salary cap savings. These renegotiations included not only such core players as QB Ben Roethlisberger and LB Lawrence Timmons, but also a few who were released within two years of their restructuring, such as OG Chris Kemoeatu and Harrison, who, as a Bengal, will make it his mission to prove the Steelers wrong for his release. Pittsburgh predictably eschewed marquee free agency and negotiated modest contracts for McLendon and CB William Gay. After extending WR Antonio Brown in July 2012 and letting Wallace go to market, Sanders will be in focus this season as he plays out a one-year deal.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Outside linebacker Jarvis Jones

From Jack Ham to James Harrison, the glamour position in Pittsburgh's D has been the outside rush-linebacker slot, and Jones is another beast-in-the-making. It's just a matter of time before the first-round pick out of Georgia beats out veteran Jason Worilds and assumes Harrison's old spot. The highest-drafted OLB in team history (No. 17), Jones is a ready-made NFL prospect: He played a 3-4 rush LB role as a Bulldog, so he won't have to make the slow transition endured by former Steelers OLBs, who've traditionally come in as undersized 4-3 college ends and converted to the stand-up spot in the pros. "We're asking him to do a job we saw him do in college," says coach Mike Tomlin. "[It's] an advantage, having played on two feet as opposed to with his hand in the dirt." Jones has the athleticism and nose for the football typical of Steelers OLBs, and in camp he showed a penchant for the disruptive play-making on which Harrison made his name. He looks to be just what Pittsburgh's pass rush lacked in 2012, when it finished with only 37 sacks (15th in the NFL). "Linebackers always lead this defense," says Jones. "I want to take on that challenge." It will be his soon enough. —D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 8-8

- SEPT. 8** Tennessee **15** at Cincinnati [Mon] **22** Chicago **29** at Minnesota\*
- OCT. 6** BYE **13** at New York Jets **20** Baltimore **27** at Oakland
- NOV. 3** at New England **10** Buffalo **17** Detroit **24** at Cleveland **28** at Baltimore [Thu]
- DEC. 8** Miami **15** Cincinnati **22** at Green Bay **29** Cleveland

**SOFT SPOT** If the Steelers hope to rebound from just their second playoff-free season under Mike Tomlin, this is the span to take advantage of: two winnable home games, plus trips to Oakland and Cleveland.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 21

**QB BEN ROETHLISBERGER**  
COMP PCT YARDS TD-INT RATING  
284 63.3 3,265 26-8 97.0

**RB LE'VEON BELL (R)**  
ATT YARDS REC TTD  
382 1,793 32 13

**WR EMMANUEL SANDERS**  
REC YARDS AVG TTD  
44 626 14.2 1

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 1

**LB JARVIS JONES (R)**  
TACKLES SACKS INT  
85 14½ 1

**SS TROY POLAMALU**  
TACKLES SACKS INT  
34 1 1

**CB IKE TAYLOR**  
TACKLES SACKS INT  
32 0 1

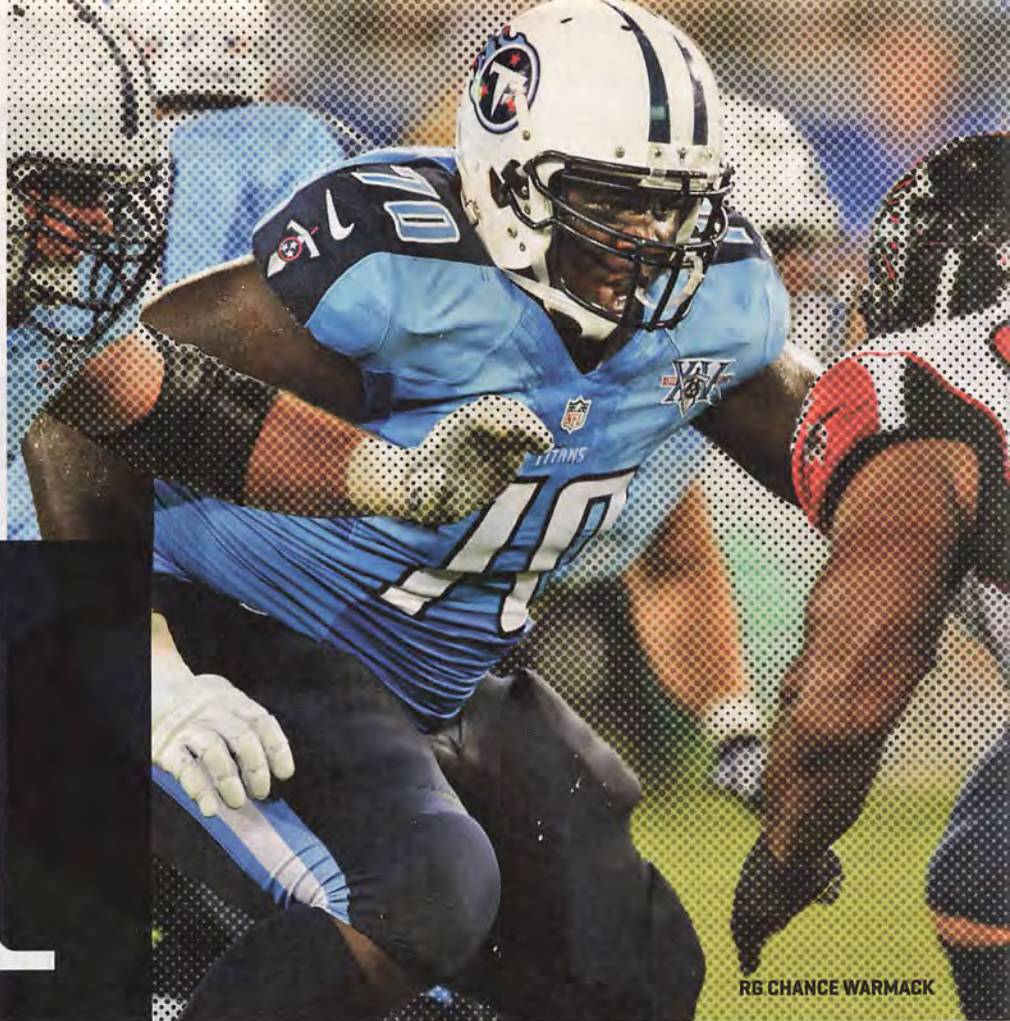
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COLLEGE STATS





## Tennessee TITANS

# 11



RB CHANCE WARMACK

→ THE SELECTION of an offensive guard with the 10th pick of the draft by a team that ranked 26th in total offense does not often trigger outright celebration—such joy is more often saved for skill players. But Titans running back Chris Johnson knows better; on the evening Tennessee took All-America Chance Warmack with that selection, he tweeted, succinctly, “Thank God.”

Which is to say that after a few seasons spent spreading the blame for his slip from CJ2K to something that at times more closely resembled CJ2YPC, Johnson was firmly on board with the Titans’ off-season priorities. A month earlier, last March, Tennessee had landed the free-agent crop’s top lineman, luring guard Andy Levitre away from Buffalo. The Titans secured Delanie Walker, a premier blocking tight end who spent the last seven sea-

Chris Johnson got what he was looking for, some Big Uglies to pave the way for a ground revival. A middling franchise, though, is still playing a game of Chance

+  
**BY  
DAN  
GREENE**

sons opening gaps for Frank Gore. And the team brought in veteran center Rob Turner to push incumbent Fernando Velasco. With the addition of Warmack and fourth-round center Brian Schwenke, from Cal, the Titans’ rock-pounding identity came into focus.

The ground-and-pound mandate comes from the top, where Mike Munchak and Bruce Matthews, Hall of Fame guards for the then Oilers in the 1980s and ’90s, have settled into their roles as head coach and offensive line coach. Entering year three, Munchak has taken a more hands-on role with his linemen, often splitting the group with Matthews during individual drills. Such one-on-one time with a head coach is rare for a lineman. “You can’t ask for anything better than that,” says left tackle Michael Roos.

Among Munchak’s more macro challenges has been putting together a unit from pieces new and old,

especially after Roos (sore back), Levitre (right knee), and right tackle David Stewart (right leg) all missed time during OTAs. For that reason, chemistry building—such as Levitre and Turner’s camp outing to Martin’s Bar-B-Que Joint outside Nashville—has been a high priority.

The early returns were somewhat encouraging. Johnson (who took his second preseason carry, against Washington, 58 yards for a TD) and free-agent signee Shonn Greene, a strong downhill runner, will put a steady hurt on opponents. But there have also been reminders that new talent alone does not transform a line. Offensive coordinator Dowell Loggains considers Warmack such a physical specimen that, he jokes, “even when he’s wrong, he’s gonna be O.K.” However, that hasn’t entirely been the case so far. The guard’s growing pains were evident in the exhibition opener against the Redskins: He surrendered a sack



on the third snap and, according to SI senior writer Greg Bedard's evaluation, graded negatively on 10 of his 28 plays.

Loggains has made clear Johnson's stake in Warmack's development, confirming that the offense's identity will center on Johnson. "When you don't know what's gonna happen in front of you, you start pressing," Johnson says, referring to the last three seasons, each of which the Titans have finished in the bottom half of the NFL in rushing. "You try to do too much. Now I feel like I can be more patient."

Loggains's plan to get the ball in Johnson's hands as much as possible means an increase, too, from the back's career-low 36 receptions last season. The idea here is less to call Johnson's number on pass plays than to encourage QB Jake Locker to check down to him in space when downfield options prove limited. **Pulling opposing safeties toward the line of scrimmage sets up throws over the top to deep threats Kenny Britt and Kendall Wright**, and an improved efficiency helps keep the Titans on the field longer than their league-low 27:41 average last season.

Like his coach, Locker is entering his third season, and his results have been mixed. His reads are wanting, especially under pressure. According to Pro Football Focus, he had a QB rating of 89.9 when he wasn't under pressure, a figure that plummeted to 38.7 against a rush. Loggains's new playbook includes bits of the pistol and the read-option, which accommodate Locker's strengths (his athleticism, speed and big arm), and he shifted from coverage-based reads to progression ones, such as those Locker used in college at Washington.

For a certain back looking for room to run, a functional passing game would be divine indeed. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>FEB. 22</b>	Sign SS George Wilson (BUF)
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Lose OG Steve Hutchinson (retirement)
<b>MARCH 13</b>	Sign TE Delanie Walker (SF), RB Shonn Greene (NYJ), OG Andy Levitre (BUF); lose TE Jared Cook (STL)
<b>MARCH 18</b>	Cut QB Matt Hasselbeck
<b>MARCH 26</b>	Sign QB Ryan Fitzpatrick (BUF), SS Bernard Pollard (BAL)
<b>APRIL 1</b>	Sign WR Kevin Walter (HOU)
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft OG Chance Warmack (Alabama), WR Justin Hunter (Tennessee)

**ANALYSIS** No longer restricted by the fiscal caution of prior G.M. Mike Reinfeldt (who left that position in 2012), the Titans came out spending this off-season. After a top-of-market \$47 million deal for Levitre, they outbid the competition on Walker and on Greene, and they added discarded free agents Wilson, Fitzpatrick, Pollard and Walter. Hasselbeck could be a key loss after he chose to mentor Andrew Luck over Jake Locker. (Wouldn't you?) But that's O.K.; coach Mike Munchak envisions a pile-driving offense behind Levitre and Warmack, fueled by Chris Johnson and Greene.

## THE CASE FOR ...

### Defensive assistant Gregg Williams

The pairing may seem like one of mutual desperation, the defensive guru Williams returning to the NFL after a yearlong suspension for his role in the Saints' bounty scandal and joining the Titans, who gave up an NFL-worst 29.4 points per game last season. But Williams's hiring as a senior assistant to coordinator Jerry Gray is more than that. **Tennessee will benefit from what the career coordinator typically brings to the table: pressure. Loads of it.** According to Pro Football Focus, the Titans have ranked 22nd in blitz percentage on pass plays over Gray's two seasons leading the D, but Gray has lacked the personnel to justify such a straightforward approach. Facing a similar situation in New Orleans in 2010 and '11, Williams's Saints ranked second and first in blitz frequency, and his waves of attackers helped his units rank as high as fourth in total defense, in '10. In Tennessee, Williams will have Derrick Morgan, an emerging end who can disrupt the pocket on his own; Akeem Ayers, who's among the league's best pass-rushing 4-3 OLBs; and safety Bernard Pollard, an enthusiastic blitzer. No question: They'll have plenty of chances to get after the QB. —D.G.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 6-10

**SEPT. 8** at Pittsburgh **15** at Houston **22** San Diego **29** New York Jets  
**OCT. 6** Kansas City **13** at Seattle **20** San Francisco **27** BYE  
**NOV. 3** at St. Louis **10** Jacksonville **14** Indianapolis [Thu] **24** at Oakland  
**DEC. 1** at Indianapolis **8** at Denver **15** Arizona **22** at Jacksonville **29** Houston

**DANGER ZONE** Playing the toughest three fourths of a tough-and-getting-tougher NFC West in one fell swoop makes for quite a midterm. At least there's a bye for wound-licking in the middle.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 26

QB JAKE LOCKER					
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING	
177	56.4	2,176	10-11	74.0	

### RB CHRIS JOHNSON

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
276	1,243	36	6

### WR KENNY BRITT

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
45	589	13.1	4

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 27

DE DERRICK MORGAN		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
59	6½	0

### LB AKEEM AYERS

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
104	6	1

### SS BERNARD POLLARD (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
98	2	1

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION





+

Miami  
**DOLPHINS**

12



WR MIKE WALLACE

→ ON THE first day of Joe Philbin's second training camp with the Dolphins, the tall and lanky coach peered out over a muggy practice field studded with new faces that were brought in to put the Dolphins back in the postseason for the first time in five years. He's "anxious," to use his word, to turn around the NFL's 27th-ranked offense. Consider that during Philbin's previous five-year term as the Packers' offensive coordinator he ran a unit that ranked as high as second and never below ninth in the NFL—success he'd hoped to transfer to South Florida. "Unfortunately," Philbin says, "we haven't had the productivity."

Not yet. But the sample size is small: just one season with a rookie head coach and a rookie quarterback. Those two enter their second year together with a roster that G.M. Jeff Ireland

You didn't expect the Dolphins to hit the ground running with a rookie coach and QB, did you? They practically did—and now they've added Mike Wallace. Watch out

+

**BY  
JENNY  
VRENTAS**

boldly transformed through an off-season spending spree. Love or hate the five-year, \$60 million contract doled out to receiver Mike Wallace, Ireland's intention was clear: Surround Ryan Tannehill—the guy drafted to be the franchise quarterback—with the weapons he needs to succeed.

The roster didn't have nearly enough of those weapons last season. Tannehill threw just three TDs to a receiver, and after Brian Hartline and Davone Bess, the next most prolific wideout registered just 11 catches. **With no deep threat (which is exactly what Wallace is), the Dolphins had only three pass plays of 40 or more yards, tied for fewest in the league.**

This off-season, as Philbin reviewed the tape of the offense, he saw the same scene unfold over and over: Opponents bunched defenders together at the line (sometimes with no safeties deep), cut-

ting off short routes and the run game. "We had holes we needed to fill," says Hartline, referring to a field-stretcher like Wallace. "Getting to three- and four-wide-receiver sets was difficult. That's changed for 2013."

On top of Wallace and Hartline (who's coming off his first 1,000-yard-receiving season), Miami added receiver Brandon Gibson, who'll line up inside. They lost one piece of the puzzle, though—a key intermediate target—when free-agent signee Dustin Keller suffered a season-ending knee injury in the preseason. The challenge now, as Tannehill put it, is "if we have the talent, we have to be able to use it."

The clock is ticking, especially considering that every top target other than Hartline is new. A week before camp opened, Tannehill rounded up teammates for bonus throwing sessions, and throughout



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August he stayed after practice to repeat missed connections or for extra deep patterns. The greatest pressure will be to validate Wallace's hefty payday, but after the receiver missed early camp time with a groin injury, Tannehill pledged, "There's no need to try to force him the ball. It is going to happen."

Miami's West Coast offense was installed—in the meeting room and on the practice field—four times in the spring and a fifth time during camp. **Philbin uses the analogy that the scheme was taught at an algebra I level a year ago and is gradually advancing this season toward the trigonometry level that he'd reached with the Packers.** Meanwhile, new players have been folded in with care, Philbin's staff charting the catches they made with their previous teams to determine how and where to best use them. "We're further along in our scheme and we have better personnel than we had a year ago," says Philbin. "I'm anxious to see us produce better."

Production will mean moving the ball and scoring more than last season's average of 18 points per game. The Dolphins haven't had a season over .500 since 2008, which was also the last time any team other than the Patriots won the AFC East.

For Miami, the offense had an inauspicious start, fumbling the exchange between Tannehill and running back Lamar Miller on the team's very first offensive play of the preseason. But Hartline, who's been with the Dolphins since 2009, sees the bigger picture, one in which his team now has, on paper, the roster that pulls them closer to the titan of the AFC East. "In order to beat the Patriots, you have to outscore them, and I think we're built for that. We're built to be a similar kind of offense—maybe with a better defense." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- MARCH 12** Sign WR Mike Wallace (PIT)  
**MARCH 13** Cut LBs Karlos Dansby, Kevin Burnett; sign LBs Philip Wheeler (OAK), Dannell Ellerbe (BAL); lose RB Reggie Bush (DET)  
**MARCH 22** Lose OT Jake Long (STL)  
**MARCH 30** Sign CB Brent Grimes (ATL)  
**APRIL 25** Draft DE Dion Jordan (Oregon), CB Jamar Taylor (Boise St.)

**ANALYSIS** In his five years as owner, Stephen Ross has aggressively tried to attract attention to the Dolphins in a crowded marketplace. This year that meant dangling a striking \$27 million guarantee (only Andre Johnson and Megatron have bigger guarantees) to land Wallace amid a dearth of free-agent WRs. He also paid top-of-market prices for Wheeler and Ellerbe (who are the right age and have upside). Miami shed previous marquee free agents Dansby and Burnett and boldly traded up to draft Jordan (who was coveted by the Eagles with the next pick). The Dolphins went all in this off-season, which puts a lot of pressure on second-year QB Ryan Tannehill to take the next step... or three.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Cornerback Brent Grimes

Grimes is no stranger to flying under the radar: He played his college ball at D-II Shippensburg (Pa.) University and then had to prove himself overseas with NFL Europa's Hamburg Sea Devils. On a team that was restocked with high-priced free agents this off-season, he's still not a headliner. But the former Falcon may be one of the Dolphins' most important additions. **The Miami secondary gave up 60 pass plays of 20 or more yards in 2012 (29th in the NFL) and intercepted just 10 balls (27th).** Grimes is returning from a season-ending Achilles tear suffered in Week 1 last year, but if healthy, he can help cure those statistical deficiencies. Having blossomed from an undrafted free agent to a Pro Bowler with Atlanta, he had 11 INTs from 2009 to '10, earning his team's franchise tag in '12. He has already impressed his new team with his competitiveness and decisiveness, as well as his mastery of Miami's defensive schemes, earning a reputation as a football junkie. G.M. Jeff Ireland took a gamble on a 30-year-old corner returning from a serious injury, but if Grimes regains his preinjury form, his one-year, \$5.5 million free-agent deal will be a steal.

—J.V.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 7-9

**SEPT. 8** at Cleveland **15** at Indianapolis **22** Atlanta **30** at New Orleans (Mon)  
**OCT. 6** Baltimore **13** BYE **20** Buffalo **27** at New England **31** Cincinnati (Thu)  
**NOV. 11** at Tampa Bay **17** San Diego **24** Carolina  
**DEC. 1** at N.Y. Jets **8** at Pittsburgh **15** New England **22** at Buffalo **29** N.Y. Jets

**DANGER ZONE** The Fins will have earned their bye once they finish an opening stretch that includes three road games in four weeks, plus home matchups against the defending Super Bowl champs and the NFC runners-up.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 27

**QB RYAN TANNEHILL**  
 COMP PCT YARDS TD-INT RATING  
 282 58.3 3,294 12-13 76.1

**WR MIKE WALLACE (N)**  
 REC YARDS AVG TTD  
 64 836 13.1 8

**WR BRIAN HARTLINE**  
 REC YARDS AVG TTD  
 74 1,083 14.6 1

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 21

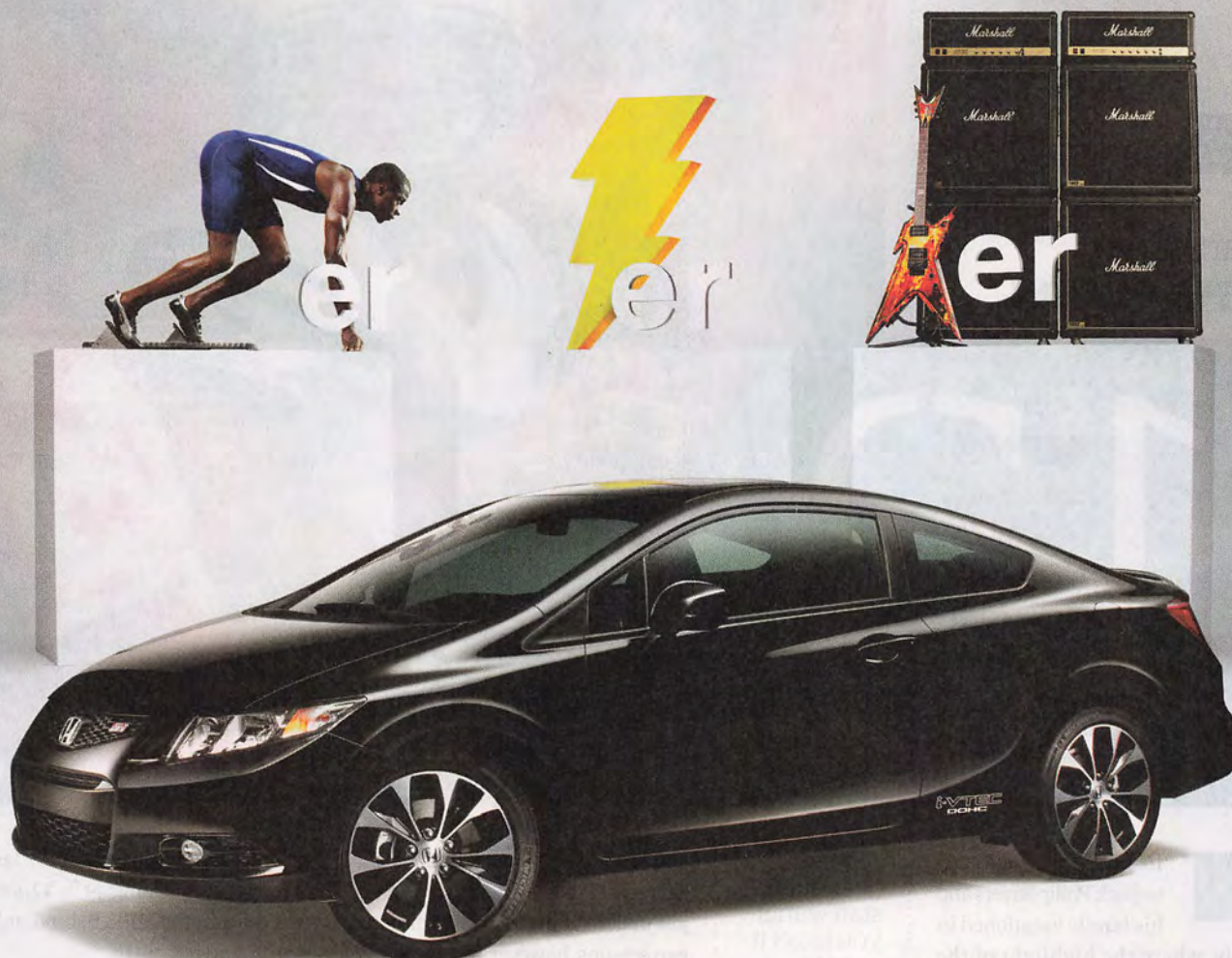
**DE CAMERON WAKE**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 53 15 0

**LB DANNELL ELLERBE**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 92 4½ 0

**FS RESHAD JONES**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 94 1 4

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION





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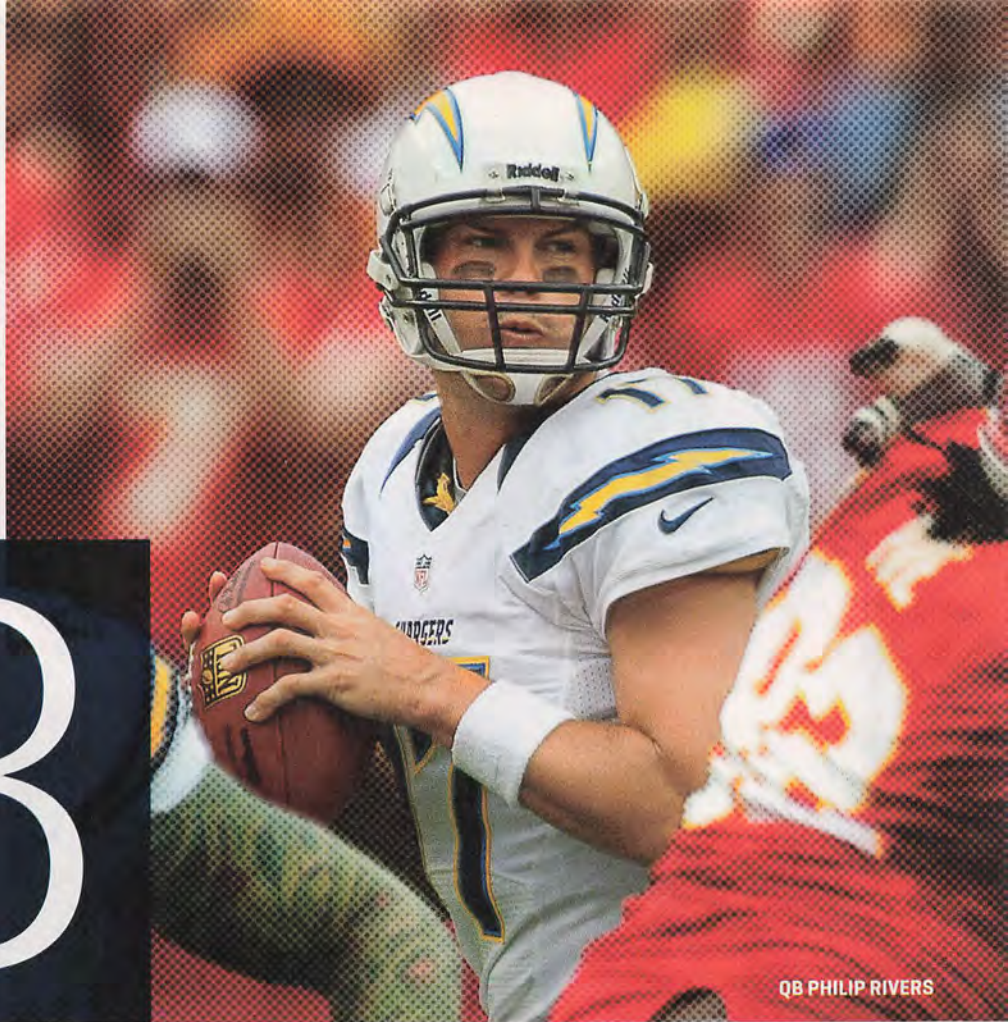
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San Diego  
**CHARGERS**

# 13



QB PHILIP RIVERS

→ IN MAY, Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers and his family vacationed in Italy, where the highlight of the trip was a papal audience near the Vatican. A devout Catholic, Rivers says he would have returned home content with simply having been among the crowd that afternoon in Rome. But the experience became transcendent when Pope Francis picked the youngest of Rivers's six children—20-month-old son Peter—from the throng, then blessed and kissed him before returning him to his parents.

"That was a once-in-a-lifetime experience," says Rivers. "Tiffany [his wife] had big tears in her eyes. It was awesome."

As Rivers embarks on his 10th season, there are critics who would say that his game could use a similar blessing. Or better, a resurrection. From 2008 to '10 Rivers was among the league's most efficient

A new coaching staff wants you to get it out of your head: Philip Rivers doesn't need an overhaul. But a few tweaks—shorter drops, more reliance on his runners—are in order

BY  
JIM  
TROTTER

and productive quarterbacks, averaging 31 TD passes, 4,324 yards and just under 15 turnovers. Over the last two seasons, however, his efficiency rate has plummeted, as he averaged 23.5 turnovers and 26.5 TDs.

It's ridiculous to proclaim, as some critics have, that this is a make-or-break season for Rivers. Even at his worst he still rates in the upper half of signal-callers. Further, his struggles have stemmed largely from the jettisoning of playmakers by former general manager A.J. Smith (who allowed such proven threats as Darren Sproles and Vincent Jackson to leave as free agents) and from the loss of two Pro Bowl offensive linemen—tackle Marcus McNeill (neck) and guard Kris Dielman (concussions)—to career-ending injuries during the 2011 season. After not being sacked more than 27 times in any of his first four seasons as a full-time starter, Rivers has been dropped

at least 30 times in each of the last three years, including 49 in '12, second most in the NFL, behind only Aaron Rodgers (51).

That's not to say that Rivers doesn't merit some blame. He's made bad decisions, throwing into coverage or reacting to nonexistent pressure. Still, a new coaching staff believes the QB's issues are largely the result of his desire to succeed. "He's extremely competitive," says coordinator Ken Whisenhunt, who spent the last six years in charge of the Cardinals. "He feels the burden of being the leader and strives to make things work. He was trying to do more than he should have."

The new staff, which includes the respected offensive minds of Whisenhunt, coach Mike McCoy (who last year coordinated the Broncos' explosive attack) and line coach Joe D'Alessandris, will attempt to take pressure off Rivers by committing more to the run and



by relying more on shorter drops. The Chargers preferred a drop-back game under former coach Norv Turner, but as Rivers lost his perimeter threats and the line fell apart, his rating dropped on attempts of 21 yards or longer, from 89.4 in 2011 to 67.2 in '12. And with big receiver Denario Alexander out for the season after tearing a ligament in his right knee, San Diego's deep-ball options are limited.

At running back the Chargers will use a committee, although Ryan Mathews, whose 707 rushing yards last year followed a 1,000-yard 2011, will be the featured ballcarrier. **McCoy is stressing to backs that he wants them to get downhill in a hurry—no dancing or bouncing to the perimeter.** Newcomer Danny Woodhead will see significant time in passing situations, not only because he's good in protection but also because he has surprised coaches with his route-running from the slot and his wideoutlike hands. Veteran Ronnie Brown still has value as a short-yardage back.

Still, it all comes back to Rivers, who is rankled by the notion that the new staff is going to have to "fix" him. "I agree with Whis—when I watch last season, it was like I was trying to will some throws," he says. "As we all know, sometimes that's the worst thing you can do.

"But the new staff has a great deal of respect for what we did in the past. They didn't come in and say, 'Let's fix this. Let's fix you.' It was, 'Hey, shoot, you went six years scoring 28 points a game. Let's see what y'all love and what we need to keep from that [system], and then here's all the stuff we have.' It's turned into a cool system that's not exactly Whis's or anyone else's. It's *ours*."

And while no one expects the new system to be infallible, for Rivers, it will keep him on his feet. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>DEC. 31</b>	Fire coach Norv Turner, G.M. A.J. Smith
<b>JAN. 9</b>	Hire G.M. Tom Telesco [IND]
<b>JAN. 15</b>	Hire coach Mike McCoy [DEN]
<b>JAN. 17</b>	Hire O coordinator Ken Whisenhunt [ARI]
<b>MARCH 13</b>	Sign CB Derek Cox [JAX]
<b>MARCH 15</b>	Sign RB Danny Woodhead [NE]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft OT D.J. Fluker [Alabama], LB Manti Te'o [Notre Dame]
<b>MAY 18</b>	Sign DE Dwight Freeney [IND]

**ANALYSIS** Out with the old, stale regime; in with the fresh, new leadership in the form of a 40-year-old G.M. and a 41-year-old coach. Cox was the team's lone preemptive strike in free agency, and the pressing corner's high demand is proved in his contract: \$20 million, \$10.3 million of it guaranteed. Further off the radar (but still significant) were the acquisitions of Woodhead and, after the loss of OLB Melvin Ingram to injury, Freeney, who will contribute immediately. The new administration's first picks, Fluker and Te'o, are building blocks for the future. The Chargers needed—and received—an infusion of change.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Outside linebacker Dwight Freeney

Freeney's hope was to retire as a Colt, with the organization that drafted him 11 years ago. But his age, 33, and his mere five sacks in 2012, the second lowest of his career, led Indy to not offer the free agent a new contract. The decision cut deeply—but not as much as the lack of excitement he created in free agency: The Chargers signed him only after their projected pass-rush threat, Melvin Ingram, was lost to a torn left ACL in OTAs. All of this has fanned the motivational flame for Freeney, who feels he's been miscast as a one-dimensional player in decline. His struggles last season had less to do with his switch from a 4-3 DE to a 3-4 OLB and more to do with his suffering a severe high ankle sprain early on. He was supposed to miss six to eight weeks, but he sat out only two games, hoping to help the Colts rebound from their miserable 2-14 season in 2011. "If I stay healthy—God willing, please, Lord, please—I'm going to have some serious fun," says Freeney. "I haven't had this much to prove since I was a rookie. The last thing you want to do is give me some extra motivation."

—J.T.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 7-9

**SEPT. 9** Houston [Mon] **15** at Philadelphia **22** at Tennessee **29** Dallas  
**OCT. 6** at Oakland **14** Indianapolis [Mon] **20** at Jacksonville **27** BYE  
**NOV. 3** at Washington **10** Denver **17** at Miami **24** at Kansas City  
**DEC. 1** Cincinnati **8** New York Giants **12** at Denver [Thu] **22** Oakland **29** Kansas City

**SOFT SPOT** The trip to Denver could be disastrous, and neither the Bengals nor the Giants are pushovers, but having four December games at Qualcomm—particularly the last two—should bolster the Bolts' push toward respectability.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 31

**QB PHILIP RIVERS**

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
338	64.1	3,606	26-15	88.6

**RB RYAN MATHEWS**

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
184	707	39	1

**TE ANTONIO GATES**

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
49	538	11.0	7

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 9

**DE KENDALL REYES**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
28	5½	0

**LB DONALD BUTLER**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
77	3	1

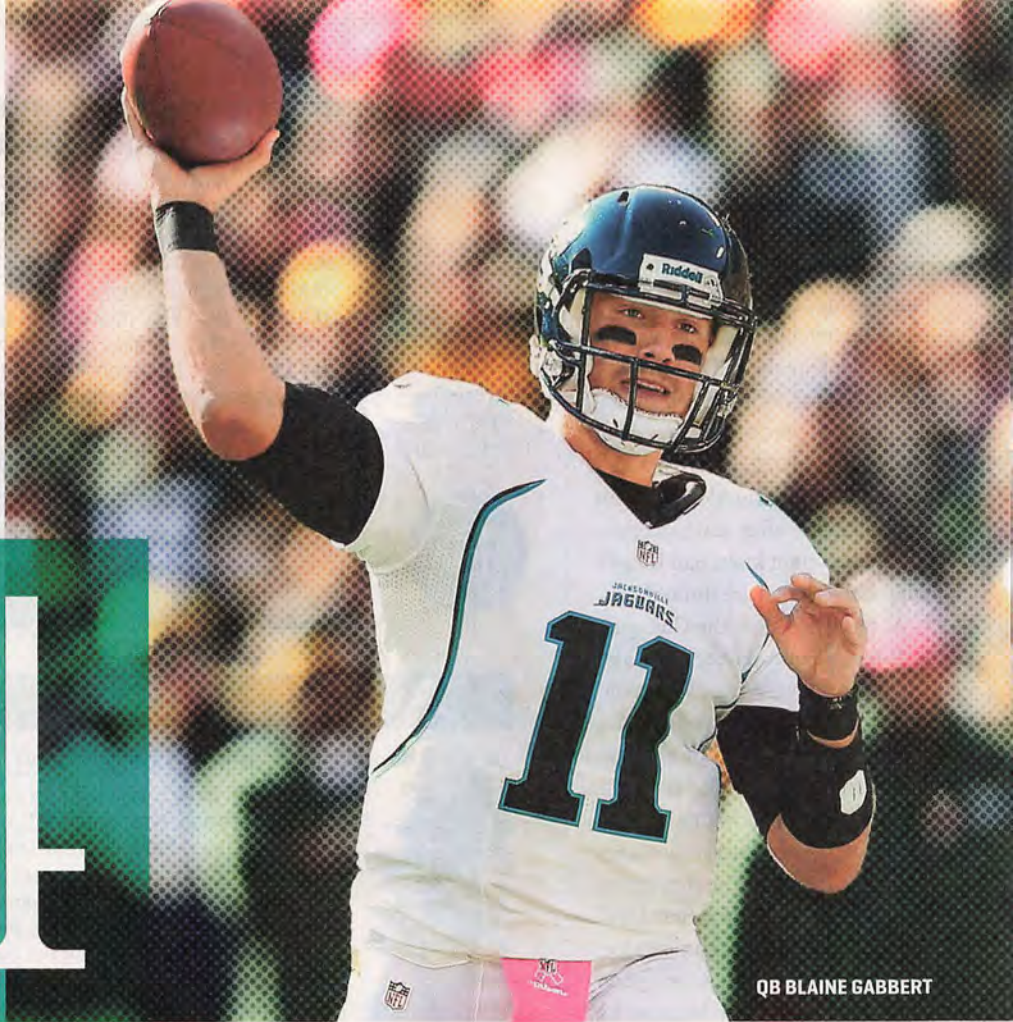
**FS ERIC WEDDLE**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
97	1	3





## Jacksonville JAGUARS



QB BLAINE GABBERT

→ TO SAY “role model” would be overstating it, but Jaguars quarterback Blaine Gabbert certainly considers Kansas City’s Alex Smith to be a kindred spirit. Like Gabbert, Smith is a former first-round pick who knows the pitfalls of a career that fails, painfully, to live up to its promise. Or at least appears to.

Drafted by the 49ers with the first pick in 2005, Smith went through the nightmare of playing under two different head coaches, six coordinators and five quarterbacks coaches during his first six seasons in San Francisco, but he persevered and saw his diligence rewarded when Jim Harbaugh took over as the 49ers’ coach in ’11. Though Smith lost his job to Colin Kaepernick last season and was traded to Kansas City in March, he’s an example of persistence that resonates with Gabbert, the No. 10 pick in ’11.

Big data—at least that offered by the front office—is the friend of Blaine Gabbert, who got a vote of confidence and a huge gift in the draft. This is his last, best shot

BY  
DON  
BANKS

At a workout this off-season in California, the two QBs swapped been-there-done-that stories. “Alex told me, ‘Keep doing what you do. Keep chipping away; things will turn around,’” says Gabbert, who in his third year in Jacksonville will play for his fourth different coach, for his third offensive coordinator and in his third offense. “They did for him, and that’s what we’re looking to do. It’s been a crazy ride, but I’m not the first quarterback to be in this situation. I won’t be the last.”

Gabbert is beginning a crucial season, but the Jags haven’t given up on him—despite his 5–19 record as a starter, which gives him the worst winning percentage (.208) of any QB with as many starts during the last two seasons. “He’s been through a lot of adversity,” says new G.M. David Caldwell, who gave Gabbert a somewhat surprising vote of confidence during his first Jaguars draft, in April, by choosing

not to select a quarterback. “He’s still very young. He’s big, fast, athletic, accurate and has a strong arm. There’s something there you can work with. It’s worth giving a shot. But no more excuses.”

Gabbert, the Jacksonville brass believed, would be a good fit in new coordinator Jedd Fisch’s spread-formation offense, which resembles the one the quarterback starred in at Missouri. Gabbert will line up often in the shotgun and will be encouraged to move the pocket so that he can throw on the run. Expect to see far more shorter routes than the stand-in-the-pocket-and-throw-downfield approach that in the past has gotten Gabbert killed behind a shaky Jaguars line.

“The philosophy we’re teaching Blaine is that you never go broke taking a profit,” Fisch says of his offense. “His job is to complete passes, and I don’t care where those come from. They don’t have to be 30- or



40-yard completions. He only threw six screen passes last season. We looked at New England and they threw [110] passes behind the line. But those passes went for a ton of yards. Completions are critical."

The Jaguars did Gabbert another solid by drafting Texas A&M tackle Luke Joeckel No. 2 in April. Joeckel, who will transition to the right side (from the left, where he played at College Station), is a much-needed upgrade for a patchwork line that played a big hand in Gabbert getting sacked on a whopping 8.2% of his career passing plays. **According to a study done by the Jags' analytics-heavy front offense, Gabbert's passer rating was in the top third of QBs last season when he was given at least 2.6 seconds to throw.** (His overall rating was 25th in the NFL.)

Backed with those stats, Gabbert won the training camp competition over veteran Chad Henne, but in the second preseason game he suffered a hairline fracture of his throwing thumb. He's expected back by the opener against—appropriately—Alex Smith's Chiefs.

Finally playing in a QB-friendly and familiar system, and surrounded by weapons—receivers Cecil Shorts and Justin Blackmon (when he returns from a four-game suspension for violating the NFL's substance abuse policy), tight end Mercedes Lewis and a healthy Maurice Jones-Drew at running back—Gabbert has his best chance yet of succeeding.

"No matter what anyone else says, Blaine still believes in himself," says Shorts, the Jags' No. 1 receiver in 2012. "You'll see the real Blaine Gabbert this year. They finally have the right people around him. It's going to make the difference."

A small one, almost certainly. A big enough one to make him the franchise's quarterback of the future? Much less certain. □

Andrew Brandt's Off-season Grade

C+



\*IN LONDON

## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>DEC. 31</b>	Fire G.M. Gene Smith
<b>JAN. 8</b>	Hire G.M. David Caldwell [ATL]
<b>JAN. 10</b>	Fire coach Mike Mularkey
<b>JAN. 17</b>	Hire coach Gus Bradley [SEA]
<b>MARCH 8</b>	Cut CB Aaron Ross, SS Dawan Landry
<b>MARCH 13</b>	Cut WR Laurent Robinson; lose CB Derek Cox [SD]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft OT Luke Joeckel [Texas A&M], RB Denard Robinson [Michigan]
<b>APRIL 30</b>	Lose WR Justin Blackmon to four-game suspension for substance-abuse violation

**ANALYSIS** Owner Shahid Khan has big plans—they're just not all in this country. He made a multiyear commitment for an annual game in London, where he's looking to expand the Jaguars' brand. [Meanwhile, he bought an English Premier League soccer team.] Stateside, new G.M. Caldwell will use his college scouting background to build through the draft. One of those youngsters, Denard Robinson, will add juice to the O, but the excitement over another, Blackmon, has been temporarily muted. Patience will be necessary for Jaguars fans.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Two rookie playmakers

After years of running a vanilla offense, the Jaguars made it clear in this year's draft that they crave a little more flavor, using fourth- and fifth-round picks, respectively, on two versatile playmakers: South Carolina receiver-punt returner Ace Sanders and Michigan QB Denard Robinson (*left*), the latter of whom will be used as an RB, WR and, occasionally, read-option QB. In a sign of the times, Jacksonville even lists Robinson—whose hands were shown to need work this off-season but who the Jaguars are determined to get the ball in space and make defenses chase—as an OW, short for offensive weapon. Of the two, the 5' 7", 178-pound Sanders actually had the more eye-opening training camp, turning in surprising work in the slot and outside, and he got plenty of looks in reverses and in motion, even lining up at the same time as Robinson occasionally. "It's going to be different than what we've done—much more multiple," says new coordinator Jedd Fisch. "[Ours] is going to be an offense shaped by what these players do best. We're not going to handcuff ourselves."

—D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 2-14

**SEPT. 8** Kansas City **15** at Oakland **22** at Seattle **29** Indianapolis  
**OCT. 6** at St. Louis **13** at Denver **20** San Diego **27** San Francisco\*  
**NOV. 3** BYE **10** at Tennessee **17** Arizona **24** at Houston  
**DEC. 1** at Cleveland **5** Houston [Thu] **15** Buffalo **22** Tennessee **29** at Indianapolis

**SOFT SPOT** No part of the schedule can look too soft after a two-win campaign, but three consecutive home games are welcome, especially with two against teams that went 6-10 in '12. December can't come soon enough.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 29

#### QB BLAINE GABBERT

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
162	58.3	1,662	9-6	77.4

#### RB MAURICE JONES-DREW

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
86	414	14	2

#### WR CECIL SHORTS

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
55	979	17.8	7

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 30

#### DE JASON BABIN

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
37	7	0

#### LB PAUL POSLUSZNY

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
139	2	3

#### SS JOHNNATHAN CYPRIEN (R)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
93	0	4

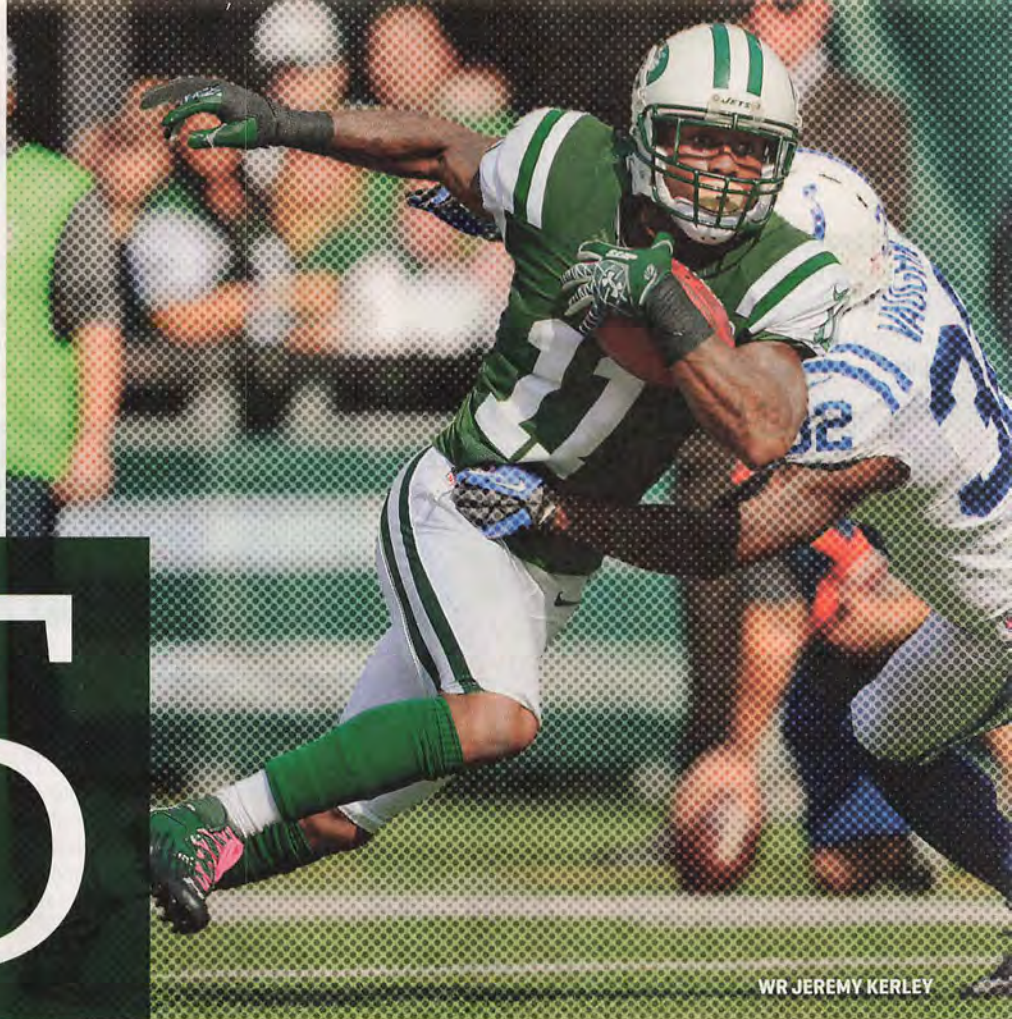
(R) ROOKIE—  
COLLEGE STATS





+  
New York  
**JETS**

# 15



WR JEREMY KERLEY

→ FOR NEARLY 30 minutes, Stephen Hill and Jeremy Kerley lingered on the field after a morning training camp session, catching ball after ball from a JUGS machine. How many?

"Infinity," Hill said. "You stay until you get tired."

For a Jets offense that ranked 30th in the league in 2012, the room to improve this season also seems infinite. But from where, exactly, will those improvements come? The team spent its entire three-week camp waiting for either the stumbling, bumblin', butt-fumblin' incumbent, Mark Sanchez, or Geno Smith, the second-round draft pick, to grab the starting QB job with force—but it didn't happen. No matter who lines up under center, however, another question is just as perplexing: Where are the playmakers?

Hill, a second-round pick in 2012, doesn't care much for that question.

A year removed from a butt fumble of a season, the Jets are hoping to sneak up on opponents. The question is: With *what*, exactly?

BY  
JENNY  
VRENTAS

As Kerley passed him on the way off the practice field one afternoon, Hill gestured at his teammate with his thumb: "This guy right here. That's a weapon. He had 800 yards."

Kerley, in fact, probably is the Jets' best offensive weapon. The third-year receiver led the team by a wide margin last season with 56 catches for 827 yards. More impressive: He caught two thirds of the passes of 20 or more yards sent his way. Given Kerley's past experience (he was a QB in high school and ran the Wild Frog offense at TCU), he's also the player most likely to operate the Wildcat offense that coach Rex Ryan says will again be "part of what we do."

Even with Kerley, there's no question that the Jets still have a dearth of playmakers, a problem that played a large hand in their 6-10 record in 2012. Working on a strict budget, the team did little this off-season to fix that. And unlike

their division-rival Patriots, they don't have a Super Bowl-winning QB to mask any deficiencies.

New York's purported No. 1 receiver, Santonio Holmes, has been sidelined since last September with a Lisfranc injury, and the timetable for his return is unclear. Last year's leading rusher, Shonn Greene, and the team's top pass-catcher in two of the past three seasons, tight end Dustin Keller, were not re-signed.

New G.M. John Idzik's free-agent additions included Mike Goodson, an explosive back who missed camp following a May arrest on drug and weapons charges; and tight end Kellen Winslow and receiver Braylon Edwards, two 30-year-olds who combined for 19 catches last season. (Edwards was cut on Monday.) Only two draft picks went toward offensive skill players: Smith and fullback Tommy Bohanon, in the seventh round. The Jets did send a fourth-rounder to New Orleans





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for running back Chris Ivory, who could be a powerful addition if he stays healthy. But weapons? That's still a work in progress.

The development of Hill, the 6' 4" former Georgia Tech receiver, is the Jets' X factor. The pressure on him started on draft night 2012, when New York's former VP of college scouting invoked Calvin Johnson as a comp for Hill, and it intensified when Holmes was lost for the season in Week 4. That rookie year, in which Hill caught just 21 passes for 252 yards before needing knee surgery in December, didn't quite match expectations. "You're a rookie, you have nerves," says Hill, "but you have to make plays."

The play with which Hill has become most associated is his costly third-down drop against the Patriots last October, but there are signs that he can succeed at this level, like his two-TD 2012 opener against the Bills. He spent camp working on technique adjustments, like his releases off the line, and he's had more than a year to transition from the triple-option offense he played in college. Hill's success hinges on being able to put his unique size and speed to work—and moving on from those drops.

The Jets, whose offense produced just 26 TDs last season, plan to open up the playbook. But creativity by the coaches would only fix one half of their struggles. They still need players who can win one-on-ones, make tacklers miss and deliver in big spots, regardless of who's throwing it.

"We don't care what people say," says Kerley. "We like to be secret assassins. We'd rather people be like, 'Where are the weapons?' And then we sneak up on you."

Implicit in those words is the acknowledgement that the Jets are not working from a position of strength. They are not. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>DEC. 31</b>	Fire G.M. Mike Tannenbaum
<b>JAN. 18</b>	Hire G.M. John Idzik
<b>JAN. 24</b>	Hire O coordinator Marty Mornhinweg (PHI); promote Dennis Thurman to D coordinator
<b>FEB. 19</b>	Cut LB Bart Scott, FS Eric Smith
<b>MARCH 15</b>	Sign RB Mike Goodson (OAK)
<b>APRIL 21</b>	Trade CB Darrelle Revis (TB)
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft CB Dee Milliner (Alabama), QB Geno Smith (West Virginia)
<b>APRIL 29</b>	Cut QB Tim Tebow

**ANALYSIS** The Jets moved purposefully to tamp down the drama of recent years: They replaced Tannenbaum with the stoic Idzik; cast off Scott, a face of the previous regime; traded Revis, removing his annual rumbles of discontent; and ended the Tebow experiment. And yet they can't turn off the noise. Shortly after receiving a \$1 million bonus, Goodson was arrested on drug and weapons charges; and again there's QB intrigue as Smith bids to unseat the well-paid Mark Sanchez. Going forward, the Jets will aim to make their noise on the field.

## THE CASE FOR...

### The defense

Since Rex Ryan took the reins in 2009, the Jets' D has never placed outside the top 10. And yet something has changed. Those attacking, impose-their-will units that he rode to AFC Championship Games in '09 and '10 have waned the past two seasons while Ryan has ceded play-calling duties to coordinator Mike Pettine and settled into the coach's chair. No longer. The best way for Ryan to lead this team is by making his mark on D, so he's thrown himself back into play-calling, hoping to restore the unit that defined his finest teams. Sure, the Jets traded away their top player, CB Darrelle Revis, but Antonio Cromartie can play at an elite level in his place. The catalyst of change will be the line, stocked with three recent first-round picks—Muhammad Wilkerson (left), Quinton Coples and Sheldon Richardson—who'll get Ryan's hands-on tutelage. In place of Pettine, now in Buffalo, Ryan promoted Dennis Thurman, a longtime co-schemer with a record of getting the most out of his players (see: Cromartie). They'll work off of the old Jets D's from '09 and '10, when blitz-heavy tactics powered the engine. Those units, by the way, ranked No. 1 and No. 3 in the NFL. —J.V.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 6-10

**SEPT. 8** Tampa Bay **12** at New England **22** Buffalo **29** at Tennessee  
**OCT. 7** at Atlanta (Mon) **13** Pittsburgh **20** New England **27** at Cincinnati  
**NOV. 3** New Orleans **10** BYE **17** at Buffalo **24** at Baltimore  
**DEC. 1** Miami **8** Oakland **15** at Carolina **22** Cleveland **29** at Miami

**SOFT SPOT** What may be a long season for Gang Green at least offers hope for a December upswing, thanks to a trio of winnable home games. Of course by that point victories might well spoil a prime draft spot.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 30

**QB MARK SANCHEZ**

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
246	54.3	2,883	13-18	66.9

**WR STEPHEN HILL**

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
21	252	12.0	3

**WR/PR JEREMY KERLEY**

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
56	827	14.8	3

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 8

**DE MUHAMMAD WILKERSON**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
69	5	0

**LB DAVID HARRIS**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
123	3	0

**CB ANTONIO CROMARTIE**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
35	0	3



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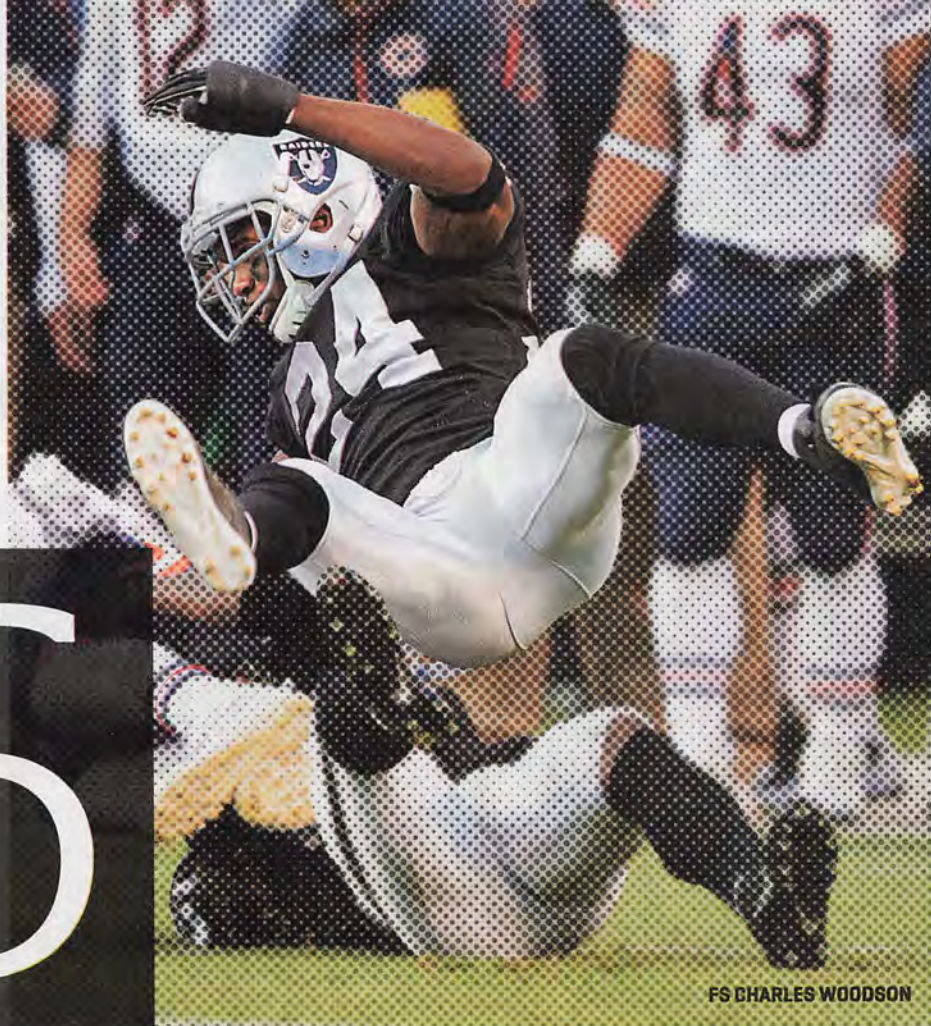






## Oakland RAIDERS

# 16



FS CHARLES WOODSON

→ RAIDERS defensive coordinator Jason Tarver was being interviewed at training camp when a reporter's digital recorder ran out of memory. After the scribe fumbled in search of a backup, Tarver suggested a solution. "Use the recorder on your phone," he offered.

For Tarver it's all about being able to adjust in the moment, which is fitting considering the record number of changes he has to deal with this season. A year after allowing the third-most offensive points in the league, Oakland will field a minimum of nine new starters, all brought in through free agency.

The decision to overhaul the D from outside the organization was antithetical to second-year G.M. Reggie McKenzie's building philosophy. McKenzie is a disciple of the Packers' Way from his 17 seasons in the Green Bay organization; the Packers largely eschew

Some big-name dumps replaced by low- and mid-level stopgaps suggest this is the rebuilding before the rebuilding. Six wins would be a major triumph

BY  
JIM  
TROTTER

free agency in favor of building for the long term through the draft. But when a franchise has had 10 straight nonwinning seasons, including a 4-12 finish last year, philosophy takes a backseat to reality. The Raiders need to turn things around—or maybe, simply, to turn back the clock, to 2002, the only other year in the modern era that a team changed as many as nine primary defensive starters in one year. That team was the Raiders, who went to Super Bowl XXXVII.

No one is thinking Super Bowl in 2013. Six wins would represent success, considering that in addition to the wholesale changes on defense, Oakland will send out a new starting quarterback for the third straight opening game. Matt Flynn, acquired in a trade with Seattle, replaces Carson Palmer, who replaced Jason Campbell.

The camp reviews on Flynn were mixed, in part because the line

struggled to protect him. (Terrelle Pryor, who outplayed him in the preseason, could push for his spot.) The line could be a seasonlong issue if left tackle Jared Veldheer misses significant time after having August surgery to repair a torn triceps. Still, coach Dennis Allen believes Flynn—despite his lack of arm strength, size and experience—has the temperament, competitiveness and football acumen to, at the least, manage games and keep from making bad situations worse.

Still, that blueprint requires a defense that can keep games close into the fourth quarter. Oakland had positive moments late last season, but the unit allowed 18 rushing TDs, tied for third most in the NFL, and 28 through the air, more than all but seven teams. Which explains that record number of changes.

The challenge of molding so many new players into a cohesive unit is significant, but Tarver is



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excited about it. He likes that he has a good mix of young, mid-level and veteran players in the meeting rooms. He also likes how the experience of his newcomers should allow for adjustments to be made mid-game. Linebacker Nick Roach is a fast, physical player who should help against the run, and Kevin Burnett has played in at least four different schemes, so he's quick at absorbing concepts. Free safety Charles Woodson, even at 36, can cover tight ends or drop down and match up on a receiver in the slot.

For all the changes, the defense remains thin up front, however—so thin that at one point in training camp it had only two healthy tackles. That's a concern because Oakland was so porous against the run last season. Then there's the pass rush. The Raiders ranked 31st among 32 teams in sacks last season, with only 25, and there is no proven edge rusher on the current roster.

Tarver says a key to pressing QBs is having the entire D work as one. That starts with linemen getting their hands up with the QB's release. He also believes his defense—compared with last year, at least—is more athletic on the second and third levels, which means he can use more 'backers and DBs in blitz packages. Lastly, he believes improved communication will help the overall pass coverage.

"Everything is about how we'll react when things are hard," Tarver says. "When Peyton Manning has the ball in the fourth quarter and he's driving, what are you going to do? We believe that men like Nick Roach and Charles Woodson and [SS] Tyvon Branch will rise up, and when they do, the other guys will rise up with them. Our belief is that we have the right people."

If nothing else, they have a lot of new people. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

**MARCH 12** Cut WR Darrius Heyward-Bey, FS Michael Huff  
**MARCH 13** Lose LB Philip Wheeler (MIA), DT Desmond Bryant (CLE)  
**MARCH 23** Lose P Shane Lechler (HOU)  
**MARCH 27** Cut DT Tommy Kelly  
**APRIL 1** Trade for QB Matt Flynn (SEA)  
**APRIL 2** Trade QB Carson Palmer (ARI)  
**APRIL 25** Draft CB D.J. Hayden (Houston), QB Tyler Wilson (Arkansas)  
**MAY 21** Sign FS Charles Woodson (GB)

**ANALYSIS** In year two of his housecleaning plan, G.M. Reggie McKenzie has discarded former first-rounders Huff and Heyward-Bey as well as the overpaid Kelly and Lechler. Palmer, once acquired for two top draft picks, was all but given away to Arizona; in turn, though, Oakland gave up just a fifth-rounder and a conditional pick for the backup Flynn, who's still trying to re-create the magic of one start two years ago with the Packers. Speaking of Packers ties, Woodson is not the elite player he once was, and he returns to the Raiders after a humbling open-market experience. Nonetheless, he'll be a leader on a young team.

## THE CASE FOR ...

### Running back Darren McFadden

When healthy, McFadden was a force in 2010 and '11 under former coach Hue Jackson, averaging at least 5.2 yards a carry each season. But after Jackson's departure, new coordinator Greg Knapp switched in '12 from a gap-blocking scheme to a zone-blocking one, and McFadden has never looked less comfortable than he did averaging a career-low 3.3 yards per carry last year, appearing totally out of sync along the way. Three things point to a renaissance in '13, provided McFadden remains healthy (which is a big if). First, Knapp was fired and replaced by Greg Olson, who spent '12 in Jacksonville and who plans to return to gap blocking. Second, Tony Sparano, one of the game's better offensive tutors, was hired to coach the line. And third, Run DMC is in a contract year. "If we can stay in the game in the fourth quarter, I'd like to believe that if we give him enough touches, and he's worn somebody down, he's going to get you that explosive play at the end of the game to win," says Olson. "We plan on getting him the ball."

—J.T.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 4-12

**SEPT. 8** at Indianapolis **15** Jacksonville **23** at Denver [Mon] **29** Washington  
**OCT. 6** San Diego **13** at Kansas City **20** BYE **27** Pittsburgh  
**NOV. 3** Philadelphia **10** at New York Giants **17** at Houston **24** Tennessee **28** at Dallas [Thu]  
**DEC. 8** at New York Jets **15** Kansas City **22** at San Diego **29** Denver

**DANGER ZONE** What's worse than a Thursday-afternoon game on the road? Try doing that in the midst of a stretch of four road games in five weeks. Also, don't forget that, in this situation, you're the Raiders.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 18

**QB MATT FLYNN (N)**

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
5	55.6	68	0-0	79.9

**RB DARREN MCFADDEN**

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
216	707	42	3

**FB MARCEL REECE**

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
59	271	52	1

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 18

**DE LAMARR HOUSTON**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
69	4	0

**LB NICK ROACH (N)**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
66	1½	0

**FS CHARLES WOODSON (N)**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
38	1½	1

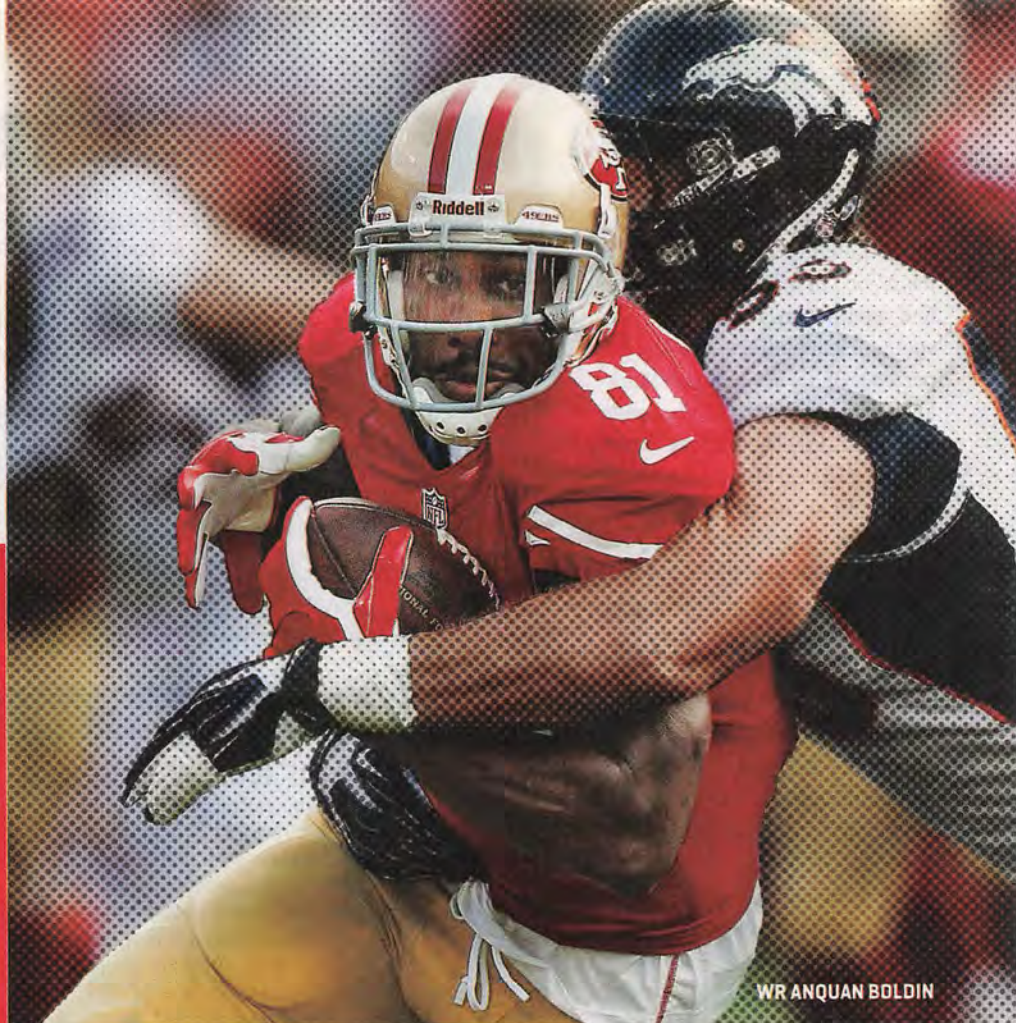
(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION





## San Francisco 49ERS

# 1



WR ANQUAN BOLDIN

→ SCENES FROM a seven-on-seven drill at the 49ers' Santa Clara, Calif., camp:

- *Showing impressive burst, number 18 gets behind cornerback Carlos Rogers. Deep help is late to arrive as 18 snags a 40-yard TD. Who is that guy? Oh, yes, it's second-year man Ricardo Lockette, of Fort Valley State.*
- *On a 15-yard crossing route through traffic, number 19 climbs the ladder, snagging a high ball. Superb grab, 19. And you are? Oh, yes, Marlon Moore, a fourth-year player with 12 career catches, late of the Dolphins.*
- *A Colin Kaepernick fastball clangs off the hands of number 14 on a shallow crosser—which is unusual. Fourteen is Chad Hall, a 5' 8" slot guy out of Air Force who's been catching everything in sight.*

More so than in summers past, spectators at Niners camp this year needed a roster, the better to puzzle out the names of the low-profile

*The Super Bowl runner-ups need a hand, a bunch of them, actually; they'll find them in their February nemesis and a tight end suddenly back in demand*

BY  
AUSTIN  
MURPHY

receivers Kaepernick was targeting. Gone from last season are Ted Ginn and Randy Moss, and languishing on the physically unable to perform list are Michael Crabtree (Achilles) and Mario Manningham (ACL). Crabtree, whose upgrade last season from good to white-hot coincided with Kaepernick's promotion to starter, is out until at least November; Manningham is out until at least mid-October.

Meanwhile, the 49ers have gone from having a Who's Who receiving corps to a unit better nicknamed **Who's He?** The NFC champs were looking a little thin at the position before a rash of minor training camp injuries (Kassim Osgood, Quinton Patton and Kyle Williams each missed practices) forced the team to sign a pair of street free agents, Lavelle Hawkins and Austin Collie. It didn't bode well that both newcomers—Collie, the ex-Colt, in particular—immediately stood out.

While not in dire straits, San Francisco looks underwhelming at receiver, although there are certainly reasons for optimism:

- *Running stride for stride with cornerback Marcus Cooper, number 81 is not open . . . until, a half-second before the ball arrives, he plants and elevates, rotating his body to the left, spearing the pass at its highest point.*

Number 81 is, of course, Anquan Boldin, the aging but effective ex-Raven for whom the Niners traded last March, five weeks after he had his way with their D-backs in Super Bowl XLVII. Offensive coordinator Greg Roman says the 49ers coveted the three-time Pro Bowler even before he roughed them up with 104 yards and a TD in the Superdome. "From the moment he stepped into the NFL, he's been a difference maker," says Roman. "He's tough, he's strong, and he plays with strong will. He makes catches that a lot of guys just don't



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- MARCH 12** Trade QB Alex Smith [KC]; trade for WR Anquan Boldin [BAL]  
**MARCH 13** Lose FS Dashon Goldson [TB], TE Delanie Walker [TEN]  
**MARCH 14** Lose DT Ricky Jean Francois [IND]  
**MARCH 19** Sign K Phil Dawson [CLE]  
**APRIL 3** Sign CB Nnamdi Asomugha [PHI]  
**APRIL 5** Extend OT Anthony Davis  
**APRIL 25** Draft FS Eric Reid [LSU], RB Marcus Lattimore [South Carolina]  
**AUG. 19** Trade for WR Jon Baldwin [KC]

**ANALYSIS** Getting a second-round pick for the supplanted Smith was good value; acquiring Boldin for a sixth-rounder was even better, especially given Michael Crabtree's injury. Goldson and Walker left for more than the 49ers were willing to pay. Asomugha is playing for a fraction of what he's still receiving from the Eagles. Lattimore was a smart, future-focused pick. [He'll have a "redshirt" season because of his shredded knee.] With Davis secured, expect an extension ahead for LG Mike Lupati. A strong off-season all around for the reigning NFC champs.

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

A-

## THE CASE FOR...

### Free safety Eric Reid

He was an engaging, upbeat teammate, one of the most popular guys in the locker room, but the 49ers didn't make it a priority to re-sign FS Dashon Goldson this off-season. Though he was stout against the run and known for highlight-reel collisions with WRs, the Niners likely reasoned that he could be a liability in coverage. With each practice that went by during camp, the decision to let Goldson go—he's now in Tampa—looked better and better. That's because the player being groomed to replace him, the rookie Reid, is faster and has better range along with a higher upside. Four years ago, when coach Jim Harbaugh was still at Stanford and Reid was a high school star in Louisiana, the teen spurned interest from Harbaugh, choosing to stay home and play for LSU. "This time," says the coach, after the Niners traded up 13 spots to draft Reid No. 18 in April, "Eric had no choice." While Reid and Craig Dahl split time with the first-team defense in the preseason, the rookie clearly outshone his elder. At 21, he's still learning the D, and he may not start against Aaron Rodgers's Packers in Week 1, but there's little question who will be the 49ers' free safety by midseason, and for years to come. —A.M.



\*IN LONDON

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 11-4-1

- SEPT. 8** Green Bay **15** at Seattle **22** Indianapolis **26** at St. Louis [Thu]  
**OCT. 6** Houston **13** Arizona **20** at Tennessee **27** at Jacksonville\*  
**NOV. 3** BYE **10** Carolina **17** at New Orleans **25** at Washington [Mon]  
**DEC. 1** St. Louis **8** Seattle **15** at Tampa Bay **23** Atlanta [Mon] **29** at Arizona

**DANGER ZONE** Three 11-win teams and a visit to St. Louis—which went 3-0 at home and 4-1-1 versus the NFC West last season, including a win and a tie against San Francisco—make for the league's most grueling September.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 11

#### QB COLIN Kaepernick

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
136	62.4	1,814	10-3	98.3

#### RB FRANK GORE

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
258	1,214	28	9

#### TE VERNON DAVIS

REC	YARDS	AVG	TD
41	548	13.4	5

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 3

#### LB NAVORRO BOWMAN

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
148	2	1

#### LB PATRICK WILLIS

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
120	1½	2

#### LB ALDON SMITH

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
66	19½	1

make. He's hardworking, intelligent, competitive, has great attention to detail—all the things you look for."

What the Niners spent August looking for was a bookend for Boldin, whose acquisition appeared especially prescient after Crabtree went down at minicamp in May. They may have found one in Vernon Davis, the sculpted (6' 3", 250, and a reported 4% body fat) tight end whose role shrank after Kaepernick replaced Alex Smith last November, but who has officially replaced Crabtree as the QB's primary target. "He's a matchup nightmare," says Kaepernick. "You can do just about anything with him."

And so Roman has, rotating the veteran between end and wideout and the slot. It's not as if Davis lacks the speed to beat people deep: He's run the 40 in 4.38 seconds. In camp, number 85 repeatedly singled Niners safeties and mismatched linebackers for 40-plus-yard gains. "The same chemistry [Kaepernick] had with Crab, I see him developing it with Anquan, with Vernon," says Roman. "That's what camp is for."

Roman will need to do *something* creative to make up for Crabtree's loss. As he puts it, "We're going to have to make the soup without that ingredient." Surely he will opt for a larger measure of Williams, a versatile, quicksilver receiver who plays all three positions and who has shown above-average resilience. After committing a pair of ghastly turnovers in the 2011 NFC title game, he attacked the following season, eventually beating out Moss for the third receiver spot before tearing his ACL in November.

Roman seems less anxious about losing Crabtree than he is excited to see which low-profile Niner seizes the opportunity created by his absence. "Someone's going to step up," he says. "They always do." But who? That remains a mystery soup. □



N

Seattle

SEAHAWKS

2



DE CHRIS CLEMONS

→ THE SEAHAWKS' defense, inarguably, was among the league's most effective last season, allowing a league-low (and franchise-best) 15.3 points per game and the fourth-fewest yards, 306.2. Still, when coach Pete Carroll and G.M. John Schneider broke down film and searched for areas of off-season upgrade, it didn't take long to realize that in contrast to Seattle's shutdown secondary, the pass rush was strangely inconsistent.

Seventeen teams had more sacks than the Seahawks' 36 in 2012, and in two playoff games Seattle had two takedowns, both of them coming against the Redskins after Robert Griffin III aggravated his right-knee injury. Against Atlanta, in addition to failing to bring down Falcons QB Matt Ryan even once, the Seahawks were unable to pressure him in the final 31 seconds, when the game hung in the bal-

A new coordinator, a tweaked scheme and plenty of moving parts—not exactly what you would expect from one of the NFL's top defenses. But it's Super Bowl quality

+  
BY  
JIM  
TROTTER

ance, and Ryan had back-to-back completions of 22 and 19 yards to set up the decisive field goal.

The loss of sack leader Chris Clemons to a torn left ACL during the win over Washington played a huge factor in those postseason struggles, but Carroll and Schneider had long before that identified the pass rush as an area of concern, which is why they signed ends Cliff Avril (Lions) and Michael Bennett (Buccaneers) in free agency. Those additions stand out among the many reasons why Seattle, which lost no starters on offense and only two on defense, has to be considered a Super Bowl contender.

Avril, with 29 sacks over the past three seasons, is a threat off the edge, and Bennett was among the top interior pass rushers with nine takedowns in 2012. If Clemons comes back healthy (which he is expected to do) and if second-year pro Bruce Irvin makes a successful

transition from end to weakside linebacker (which for someone of his athleticism shouldn't be a major problem), the Seahawks will take pressure off the secondary. In camp, Avril flashed a coy smile as he envisioned a pass-rush package that could include himself, Clemons (11½ sacks last season), Irvin (eight) and Bennett. "That's essentially four ends on the field at the same time," he said. "I'll take four defensive ends over two ends and two tackles anytime. The athleticism is going to be tremendous."

The Seahawks aren't lacking for much else. Marshawn Lynch, last season's No. 3 rusher with 1,590 yards, and dual-threat quarterback Russell Wilson, who in 2012 became just the seventh rookie signal-caller to participate in a Pro Bowl, will keep the offense humming. Multipurpose weapon Percy Harvin, acquired in a trade with Minnesota, is out for at least three months follow-



ing hip surgery, but there's no sense of panic—Seattle scored 34.0 points per game over the final eight weeks last season without him.

All of which is to say, one can see how it takes some nitpicking to find ways to improve. Under new coordinator Dan Quinn, the hybrid 4-3 base defense will look much the same schematically, with subtle yet significant differences aimed at putting more pressure on the quarterback. In the past Seattle's Leo (meaning hybrid end) line-backer would be the only one rushing in nickel situations. This season Quinn is free to send strongside 'backers as well, which partly explains Irvin's move to the position.

"There are almost 600 snaps a year in nickel," Quinn points out. "I'd like to have more rushers available; all the [strongside linebackers] that are being trained as rushers can play ends in our nickel packages."

There are some complications. Quinn has to deal with the minutiae of moving pieces: Irvin's switch coincides with his missing valuable time while he serves a four-game suspension for a positive test for a banned substance; Clemons spent the first few weeks of training camp rehabbing instead of practicing (he's planning to be back Week 1); and Avril, who almost always played on the left side in Detroit, will be asked to play on the right.

"It's going to be different," says Avril. "Seeing the ball on my right side is normal to me. Now, playing on the right and seeing the ball on my left, my stance has to change, my thought process has to change. My right hand is stronger. These are all things I have to sharpen up in the next few months. . . . Football is football, though, and eventually you adjust and go out and play."

The personnel is in place. Let the third-and-longs begin. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>JAN. 17</b>	Lose D coordinator Gus Bradley (JAX); hire D coordinator Dan Quinn (Florida)
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Trade for WR Percy Harvin (MIN); cut RB Leon Washington
<b>MARCH 14</b>	Sign DE Cliff Avril (DET)
<b>MARCH 16</b>	Sign DE Michael Bennett (TB)
<b>APRIL 1</b>	Trade QB Matt Flynn (OAK)
<b>APRIL 17</b>	Sign CB Antoine Winfield (MIN)
<b>APRIL 22</b>	Re-sign S Kam Chancellor
<b>MAY 7</b>	Lose CB Marcus Trufant (JAX)

**ANALYSIS** The Seahawks not only spent multiple draft picks on Harvin, who's shelved indefinitely following hip surgery, but rewarded him handsomely, too: \$67 million, \$14.5 million of it fully guaranteed. Shorter-term value deals for Avril and Bennett will upgrade a D-line beset by injury (Chris Clemons) and suspension (DE Bruce Irvin, four games); and the veteran Winfield is a proven leader and cover presence. Chancellor's deal (four years, \$28 million) is the first of what may be three big contracts—with Brandon Browner and Richard Sherman to come—for one of the NFL's top secondaries.

## THE CASE FOR . . .

### Wide receiver Golden Tate

Multipurpose threat Percy Harvin is out following hip surgery, opening the door for new playmakers, and Tate has the skill set to capitalize. The 5' 10" 202-pounder has blazing speed [his 4.42 40 ranked fourth among WRs in his 2010 draft class], extraordinary hands and tenacity [Fail Mary, anyone?], and after-the-catch ability that makes him a threat to take any reception the distance, as he did in powering through four Bears defenders en route to a 14-yard TD last December. As if you needed more reason to believe, he also has the incentive that comes with a contract year. Consistency, however, has not been a staple of his game. Yet. Throughout camp he sounded **more mature, more focused and better prepared to turn his potential into sustained production.** The Seahawks have a dominant back in Marshawn Lynch, which is a nice, fluffy cushion for the loss of Harvin, who will be a beast in the read-option when (or if) he gets healthy. But until then, Tate will help ensure that a balanced offense keeps running at Mach 5.

—J.T.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 11-5

**SEPT. 8** at Carolina **15** San Francisco **22** Jacksonville **29** at Houston  
**OCT. 6** at Indianapolis **13** Tennessee **17** at Arizona [Thu] **28** at St. Louis [Mon]  
**NOV. 3** Tampa Bay **10** at Atlanta **17** Minnesota **24** BYE  
**DEC. 2** New Orleans [Mon] **8** at San Francisco **15** at N.Y. Giants **22** Arizona **29** St. Louis

**DANGER ZONE** Four trips in five weeks, three out of Seattle's time zone, is brutal, regardless of the competition [only two '12 playoff teams]. It's the type of road swing that could fatigue even a team in Pete Carroll's kinetic image.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 17

**QB RUSSELL WILSON**  
 COMP PCT YARDS TD-INT RATING  
 252 64.1 3,118 26-10 100

**RB MARSHAWN LYNCH**  
 ATT YARDS REC TTD  
 315 1,590 23 12

**WR SIDNEY RICE**  
 REC YARDS AVG TTD  
 50 748 15 7

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 4

**DT BRANDON MEBANE**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 56 3 0

**CB RICHARD SHERMAN**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 64 1 8

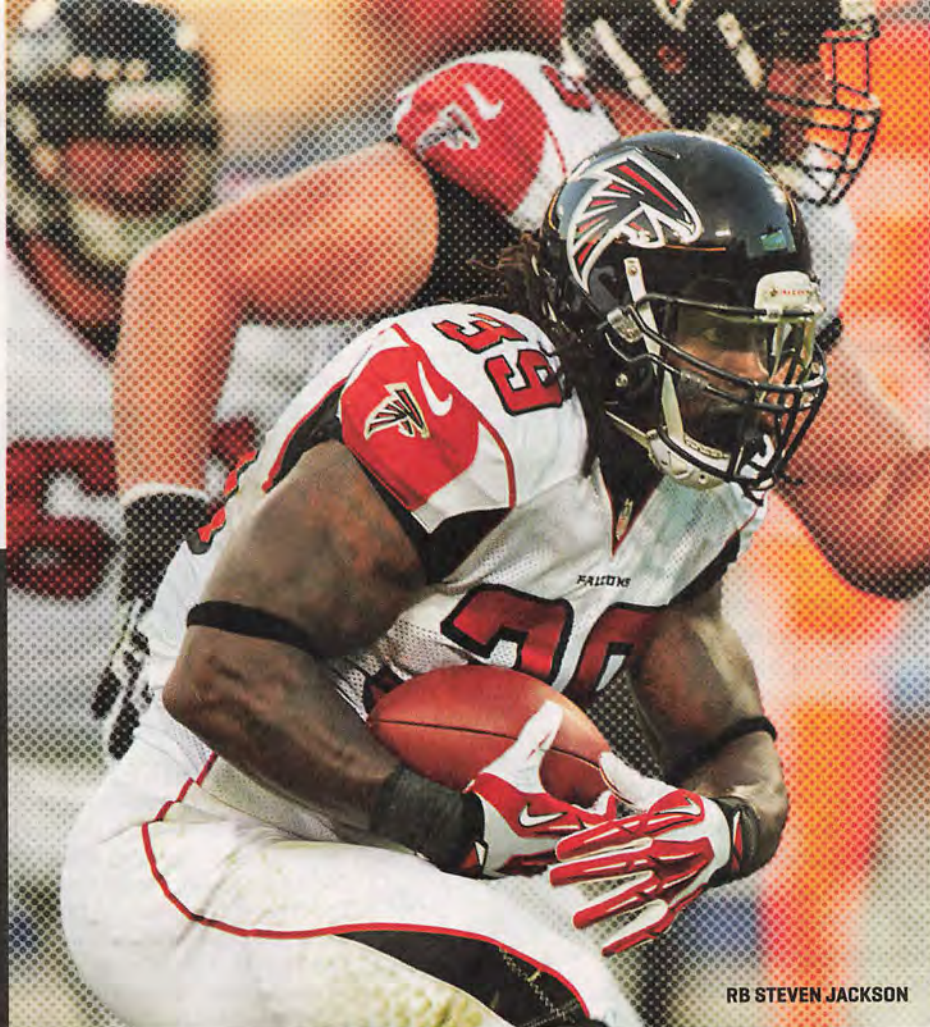
**FS EARL THOMAS**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 66 0 3



# N

## + Atlanta FALCONS

# 3



RB STEVEN JACKSON

→ THE FALCONS' passing attack has everything: game-changers, possession guys, balance. The receiving trio of Julio Jones (with his rare alloy of size and speed), Roddy White (unbelievable strength in traffic) and Harry Douglas (a little of each) is well-blended; tight end Tony Gonzalez, even at 37, is an athletic pass-catcher and a beast in the middle of the field; and quarterback Matt Ryan, thanks to all that firepower, is an MVP candidate. And yet Atlanta's offensive shortcoming was exposed in the NFC Championship Game, when it blew a 17-0 lead to the 49ers. In the end the Falcons, held to 81 yards on 23 carries (a 3.5-yard average), couldn't grind out the game. The 49ers, meanwhile, gobbled up 149 rushing yards and scored their final two TDs running.

Good teams win to run (not the other way around), meaning

The passing game is as balanced and well-oiled as they come, but the franchise needed to make a ground-breaking off-season move. Hello, Steven Jackson

+  
**BY  
GREG  
BEDARD**

that they build leads and power home victories on the ground. The Falcons, who ended the 2012 season with 30-year-old plodder Michael Turner averaging a career-low 3.6 yards per carry, and who ranked 29th with 87.3 rushing yards per game, couldn't do that.

The flaw was obvious, and the Falcons remedied it efficiently in the off-season. After nine years in the NFL without once tasting a winning record with the Rams, Steven Jackson, 30, voided the final year of his contract and signed with Atlanta for \$12 million over three years. It's a good deal only if Jackson becomes the type of threatening bruiser that defenses have to respect—something that few running backs of his age have been. Only 44 times in NFL history has a back aged 30 or over rushed for more than 1,000 yards, but 16 of those have come in the past decade. "I think that's average,"

Jackson says of the poor track record of thirtysomethings. "That, to me, is talking about average guys that have done average things. I don't think I'd [be playing at] 30 if I wasn't more than that."

The tape on Jackson—even with 2,415 carries on the meter—reveals something far above average. At 6' 2", 240 pounds, he's built like a tank, yet possesses terrific speed for his size. Against the Cardinals last season, he cut back a designed run over right tackle and made linebacker Sam Acho look foolish in the open field. Instead of going out-of-bounds, he saw hard-charging safety Kerry Rhodes, sought him out with his lead shoulder and picked up another eight yards.

And yet, if you were to poll NFL defensive players, Jackson would be a runaway favorite for being the most underappreciated back during his time in the pros.



Players don't win games, fans do. Duh.



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"Four or five years into my career, that bothered me," Jackson says of being underrated. "It really, really got under my skin. But now, seeing that my peers appreciate the way I go about business and seeing a lot of people build me up—the next thing they wait for is the fall. I've been so under the radar that I've been able to get to year 10 and still be a surprise to a whole new crowd."

"He's kind of a throwback at the position," Ryan says of Jackson. "He does everything well. He's not a one- or two-down back, or even just a third-down back. I think that makes it extra tough for defenses to defend [us]."

Throwback, yes, but with speedster Jacquizz Rodgers and versatile Jason Snelling rotating into the backfield, he won't have to be a workhorse. If that rotation conserves energy, Jackson—the kind of back who needs to be gang-tackled even when he *isn't* fresh—should open up space for Ryan. Or Jackson could close games out on his own, something the Falcons couldn't do against the 49ers last January.

Only one time in the past decade has an over-30 running back rushed for 1,000 yards and won a Super Bowl. That was Corey Dillon, another talented runner tired of losing (with the Bengals), who got his ring after he was traded to the Patriots. The Dillon-Patriots pairing proved the perfect match between a back in need of a supporting cast and a talented team that needed one piece to win a title.

Jackson thinks his arrival in Atlanta can have that kind of ending. "I've been the most consistent runner the last nine years," he says, "and I plan on doing that for more now that I've been given a fresh breath and a new opportunity. I want to prove that I'm bringing something to the team, not just [riding] on coattails." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

A-



\*IN TORONTO

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION

## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- MARCH 1** Cut RB Michael Turner, CB Dunta Robinson, DE John Abraham  
**MARCH 14** Sign RB Steven Jackson (STL), re-sign TE Tony Gonzalez  
**MARCH 25** Lose C Todd McClure (retirement)  
**MARCH 27** Sign LB/DE Osi Umenyiora (NYG)  
**MARCH 30** Lose CB Brent Grimes (MIA)  
**APRIL 25** Draft CB Desmond Trufant (Washington);  
 CB Robert Alford (Southeastern Louisiana)  
**JULY 25** Extend QB Matt Ryan

**ANALYSIS** Ryan's guaranteed compensation is the second-highest in NFL history; he earned those big bucks by waiting to sign an extension until after Joe Flacco, Tony Romo and Aaron Rodgers had already done so this off-season, then leveraging their deals. Falcons brass deemed Turner and Abraham at the end of their shelf lives, and they both struggled in the open market, suggesting Atlanta was spot-on in letting them go. Elsewhere, the team replaced Robinson and Grimes with top draft picks Trufant and Alford. Jackson and Umenyiora represent veteran value—reasonable deals in a soft market.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Outside linebacker/end Osi Umenyiora

In 2012, Atlanta ranked 28th in the league with 29 sacks. Veteran end John Abraham, the man who had 34.5% of those takedowns (10), was cut at age 34 and signed very late with the Cardinals. Enter the free agent Umenyiora, who ranks 10th among active players, with 75 sacks. G.M. Thomas Dimitroff must see something special in the 31-year-old former Giants end because his combined 15 sacks in '11 and '12 was his worst two-year total since his first two seasons; and now he'll be asked to do more things as the weakside OLB when coordinator Mike Nolan's flex defense lines up in a 3-4. "Never really done that before," Umenyiora says of playing in a two-point stance. But as coach Mike Smith points out, his won't be a wholesale change; teams now play most of their snaps out of nickel or dime packages anyway, and Umenyiora will play with a hand on the ground in those. "He's not done a whole lot of [that]," says Smith, "but with the flexibility we want, it gives us an opportunity to disguise." Umenyiora will be paramount because, frankly, the rest of the pass rush showed it had a way to go in the preseason. The experience he brings should help. —G.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 13-3

**SEPT. 8** at New Orleans **15** St. Louis **22** at Miami **29** New England  
**OCT. 7** New York Jets (Mon) **13** BYE **20** Tampa Bay **27** at Arizona  
**NOV. 3** at Carolina **10** Seattle **17** at Tampa Bay **21** New Orleans (Thu)  
**DEC. 1** at Buffalo **8** at Green Bay **15** Washington **23** at San Francisco (Mon) **29** Carolina

**SOFT SPOT** October should be kind to the Falcons, who have no opponents with winning 2012 records. While the rest of the NFC South confronts more treacherous slates, this is a chance to create separation.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 8

**QB MATT RYAN**  
 COMP PCT YARDS TD-INT RATING  
 422 68.6 4,719 32-14 99.1

**RB STEVEN JACKSON (N)**  
 ATT YARDS REC TTD  
 258 1,045 38 4

**WR JULIO JONES**  
 REC YARDS AVG TTD  
 79 1,198 15.2 10

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 24

**DE OSI UMENYIORA (N)**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 43 6 0

**LB SEAN WEATHERSPOON**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 95 3 1

**SS WILLIAM MOORE**  
 TACKLES SACKS INT  
 75 1 4



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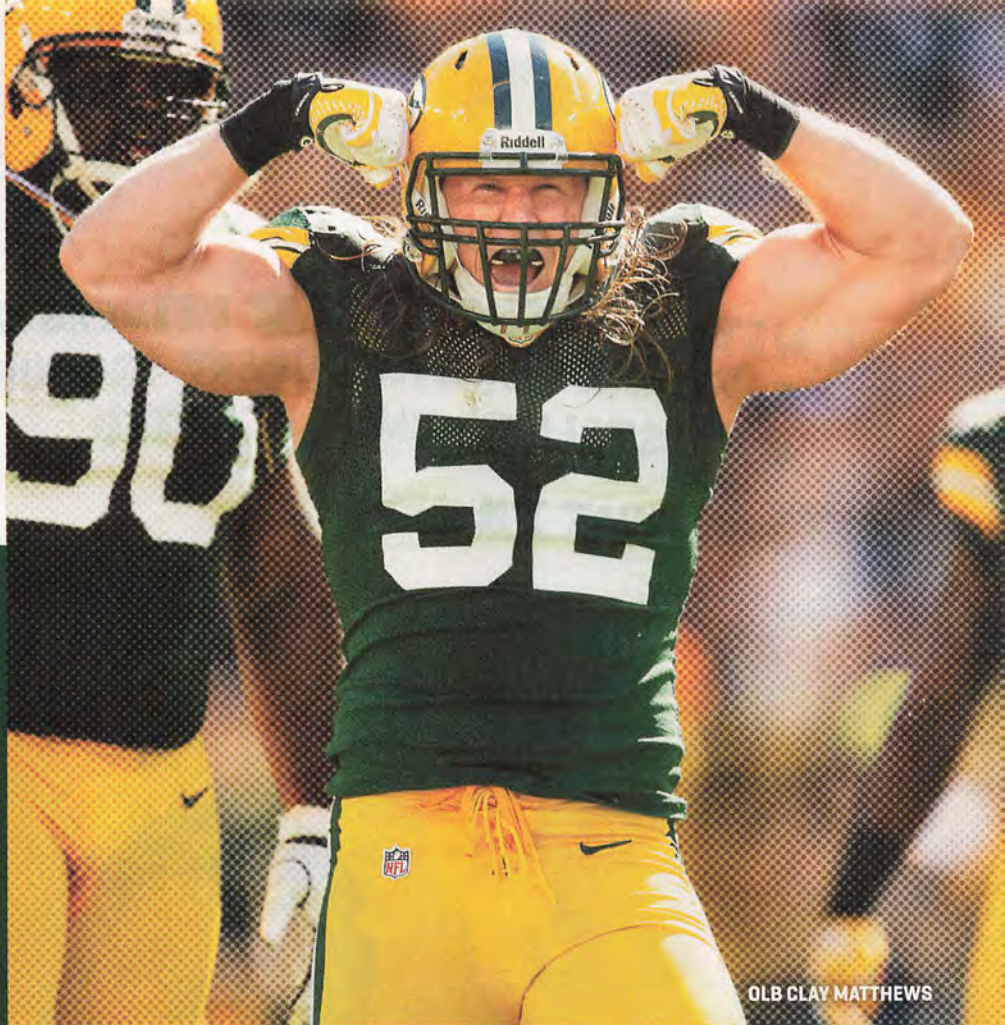
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N

Green Bay  
PACKERS

4



OLB CLAY MATTHEWS

→ CLAY MATTHEWS and the Packers' defense will be tested immediately, opening on the road against the 49ers and facing the same Colin Kaepernick-led offense that embarrassed Green Bay at Candlestick Park in an NFC divisional playoff last January. In San Francisco's 45–31 victory, the Packers' defense was completely overmatched, as the rookie quarterback read-optioned them into the ground, rushing for 181 yards as the Niners rolled up 579 yards of total offense.

For a team with four consecutive playoff trips, including a Super Bowl XLV championship, and whose gaudy 47–17 regular-season record since the start of the 2009 season is tops in the NFC, **the defeat served a useful purpose by forcing Green Bay to carefully examine its priorities.** Yes, the team signed franchise

They sank a fortune into their franchise quarterback, but their big-ticket expense on the other side of the ball is no less vital to a title run

BY  
DON  
BANKS

quarterback Aaron Rodgers to a five-year, \$110 million extension, giving him the highest per-season salary in NFL history. But the Packers also made Clay Matthews the game's highest-paid linebacker when they sealed a five-year, \$66 million deal with the 27-year-old veteran, who is more valuable to them than ever.

The 6' 3", 255-pound former first-round pick is now the face of the Green Bay defense, the first player in franchise history to earn four consecutive Pro Bowl berths at the start of his career, during which he has 50 sacks (third most in the league), including playoffs. "[The extension] showed that the team obviously appreciates and has bought into what I'm all about," says Matthews of his new deal, which could keep him with the Packers through the end of 2018. "I want to continue to help steer this

defense in the right direction."

Matthews knows that means there can't be any more disasters such as the one in San Francisco last January. "That read-option offense creates a lot of problems for a defense, and **we had to work this off-season on recognizing and being aggressive, attacking against that offense rather than waiting around for them to hit us,**" he says. "You look at Kaepernick, RG3 and Russell Wilson, and the read-option offense got the best of most teams last year."

Matthews's strength as an edge rusher—he is, in fact, one of the game's best—masks his excellence as a run defender, though he will need more help from the rest of the front seven, whether coordinator Dom Capers goes with a 3–4 or the 2–4–5 he often used last year. The Packers ranked fourth in the NFL with 47 sacks in 2012 and are



counting on an even better pass rush that gets production from outside linebacker Nick Perry—a 6' 3", 265-pound first-rounder in '12—who tore a tendon in his left wrist and was limited to only six games (two sacks) last season. The rush defense, however, was an issue long before Kaepernick dismantled a unit that allowed 4.5 yards per carry during the regular season.

The most noticeable change in the secondary is the free-agent departure of Charles Woodson, which will be felt mostly on inside coverages, where Woodson excelled. A deep group of strong man-to-man corners is led by Casey Hayward (who missed much of training camp with a hamstring injury), Sam Shields and Tramon Williams—though Williams has yet to play as well as he did in 2010. Safety, though, is a concern. Morgan Burnett is a dependable free safety, but with Woodson gone the void must be filled by either Jerron McMillian or M.D. Jennings. Either replacement is a downgrade.

On defense, however, everything starts—and often ends—with Matthews. His teammates say they have already seen a difference in his locker room demeanor, sometimes in quiet, one-on-one sessions with fellow defenders, and sometimes in larger settings, when he is more demonstrative and vocal. "I understand that it's not exactly his nature, and he's not a rah-rah type of guy; I'm not either," says Rodgers. "But he has that position now. Every time he speaks, he has the opportunity to make a difference. Guys respect him and respect what he has to say, and he has the chance now with Charles gone to say some things and lead." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>FEB. 15</b>	Cut SS Charles Woodson
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Lose LB Erik Walden (IND)
<b>MARCH 15</b>	Lose WR Greg Jennings (MIN)
<b>APRIL 17</b>	Re-sign LB Clay Matthews
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft DE Datone Jones (UCLA), RB Eddie Lacy (Alabama), RB Johnathan Franklin (UCLA)
<b>APRIL 26</b>	Re-sign QB Aaron Rodgers
<b>JUNE 17</b>	Cut LB Desmond Bishop

**ANALYSIS** That's one short list. Why? The ultimate draft-and-develop team, the Packers eschew free agency, trust their scouts, develop a young talent pipeline and extend core players. That pipeline should replace Woodson, Bishop and Walden on defense. Lacy and Franklin are rare RBs who will contribute immediately. Despite ignoring the open market, Green Bay was still one of the highest-spending teams, securing top-of-market extensions for Rodgers and Matthews, who will make \$61 million combined in '13. As for Jennings, one extension was enough; the Packers have ample homegrown talent at WR too.

## THE CASE FOR ...

### Running back Eddie Lacy

It took a little patience during the April draft before Lacy found his new home, and it could take a little time for him to make his presence felt in Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers-centric offense. But this latest wait won't be too long. The second-round pick out of Alabama will end the recent spate of Green Bay runners that go nowhere fast. **The Packers started five tailbacks in 2012 and featured seven single-game leading rushers**, including Rodgers, whose 259 rushing yards ranked second on the team, behind only Alex Green's 464. But that committee approach, which produced a mere nine TDs, just got disbanded. At 5' 11", 230-plus, Lacy runs with power, vision and quick feet, and his ability to hit the hole and run north-south without hesitation makes him the downhill runner that coach Mike McCarthy has craved for years. "For a big man," says G.M. Ted Thompson, "he's got the eyes and feet to see that hole and get in it." The Packers doubled down at running back in the draft, taking UCLA's elusive Johnathan Franklin in round 4, but he'll likely be a third-down back, with Lacy expected to assume the starting role. Green Bay's investment in its long-stagnant running game is about to pay off. —D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 11-5

**SEPT. 8** at San Francisco **15** Washington **22** at Cincinnati **29** BYE  
**OCT. 6** Detroit **13** at Baltimore **20** Cleveland **27** at Minnesota  
**NOV. 4** Chicago (Mon) **10** Philadelphia **17** at New York Giants **24** Minnesota **28** at Detroit (Thu)  
**DEC. 8** Atlanta **15** at Dallas **22** Pittsburgh **29** at Chicago

**DANGER ZONE** After a rematch of the 2012 opener and a divisional playoff game [both Green Bay losses] come two meetings with rising contenders. By the bye, Mike McCarthy should have a good sense of where this team stands.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 13

#### QB AARON RODGERS

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
371	67.2	4,295	39-8	108.0

#### RB EDDIE LACY (R)

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
204	1,322	22	19

#### WR RANDALL COBB

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
80	954	11.9	9

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 11

#### NT B.J. RAJI

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
26	0	0

#### LB CLAY MATTHEWS

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
43	13	0

#### SS MORGAN BURNETT

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
123	2	2

(R) ROOKIE—  
COLLEGE STATS



# N

## New Orleans SAINTS

# 5



OLB WILL SMITH

→ ON THE seventh day of training camp, the routine was starting to get stale. New defensive coordinator Rob Ryan, however, knew just the right call to make.

While reviewing his blitz package, Ryan got to a particular blitz called “Mannie Fresh,” named after the New Orleans-based rapper and producer who happens to be a huge Saints fan. Ryan kept harping on the defense’s inability to get the blitz down correctly.

“He’s grilling us on it, and then he turns around and pulls up this video of Mannie Fresh rapping,” says linebacker Curtis Lofton. “Rob turns up the music and he’s up there dancing and guys are laughing. But then, in comes Mannie Fresh, and the place just went crazy.”

Part coach, part entertainer, Ryan has quickly captured the attention and respect of his players. Who could blame him for try-

*Loud. Entertaining. Swagger.* It’s been an off-season blitz of those words commonly associated with Rob Ryan and his defense. But it’s time the results live up to the hype

BY  
DON  
BANKS

ing to bring smiles to the faces of his defenders after they lived through the bounty-scarred 2012 season?

Abysmal only begins to describe the Saints’ D last year. New Orleans gave up the most yardage in NFL history (7,042), obliterating the mark set by the 1981 Baltimore Colts (6,793). Under coordinator Steve Spagnuolo, the unit finished last in the NFL against the run (147.6 yards per game, a franchise low), second to last against the pass (292.6), second to last in points allowed (28.4), and last in average rush (5.2), another franchise worst. The 2012 Saints gave up more than 500 yards in a game four times, and those breakdowns weren’t all tilted toward the front half of the schedule, when the defense was depleted by bounty-related suspensions: In Week 17 a ho-hum Panthers offense rolled over the Saints for 530 yards in the Superdome.

That’s the defense Ryan, 50, inherited when he was hired by New Orleans, after Jerry Jones fired him as Dallas’s coordinator. (His Cowboys finished 19th in total defense last year.) But Ryan dismisses the Saints’ performance in 2012 as an anomaly. “It’s not fair to look at that team given the circumstances it was put through,” he says.

Still miffed about losing his job with the Cowboys, Ryan says he and the Saints are a perfect fit. “I want to prove something, and everyone on our defense wants to prove something,” he says.

While Ryan doesn’t entirely mirror disgraced former Saints defensive coordinator Gregg Williams—the architect of the team’s Super Bowl XLIV-winning defense, but also of its infamous bounty program—he brings a similar attacking mentality, he loves to dial up a complex array of blitzes, and he’s known for his swagger and



salty language. Ryan brings in his own 3-4 defense, replacing the 4-3 that Williams predominantly played, but recall: Both men learned early defensive lessons from Buddy Ryan, Rob's father, with whom Williams coached on the Houston Oilers staff of the early 1990s. Rob Ryan's lean-in philosophy on defense will help the Saints, who too often played back on their heels under Spagnuolo.

"He's the right guy for this team," says Bobby Hebert, an ex-Saints QB turned New Orleans radio host. "I'm not saying he's the second coming of Gregg Williams, but [the fans and the players] embrace the Gregg Williams mentality—setting the tone, dictating tempo, being aggressive, creating turnovers. They won a Super Bowl that way on D."

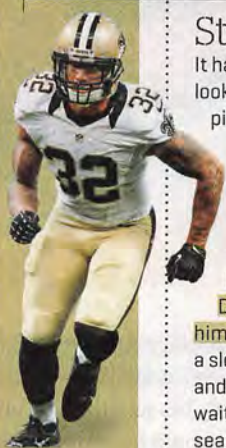
But does Ryan have the necessary parts to do that with his 3-4? His D relies heavily on the pass rush, and that means outside linebackers Junior Galette, Will Smith and Martez Wilson have to create pressure, along with ends Cameron Jordan and Akiem Hicks. The preseason results were encouraging, with Smith, an end for nine seasons, warming to his new role at linebacker, and both Galette and Jordan flashing in pass-rush situations.

With coach Sean Payton's return to the sideline after a year-long suspension, the Drew Brees-led offense is expected to be even stronger; last season New Orleans ranked No. 3 in scoring. If Ryan can rebuild his unit's confidence and find enough pass rush to make his pressure-at-all-costs defense work, fans will forget 2012 ever happened.

"He's got a swagger and a presence," says Brees, "and that's when we play our best, on both sides of the ball—when we have that aggressive mentality. That's how we've won here."

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>JAN. 22</b>	NFL reinstates coach Sean Payton
<b>JAN. 24</b>	Fire D coordinator Steve Spagnuolo
<b>FEB. 9</b>	Hire D coordinator Rob Ryan
<b>FEB. 19</b>	Cut TE David Thomas
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Lose LT Jermon Bushrod [CHI], QB Chase Daniel [KC]
<b>MARCH 14</b>	Sign CB Keenan Lewis [PIT]
<b>MARCH 18</b>	Sign TE Benjamin Watson [CLE]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft SS Kenny Vaccaro [Texas], OT Terron Armstead [Arkansas-Pine Bluff]

**ANALYSIS** The Saints' most important off-season happening was twofold: Payton's return from suspension and his signing a lucrative contract extension. In the coach's first act, he fired Spagnuolo and hired the fiery Ryan, attempting to spark the team's leaky D. The latter's bluster had worn thin in Dallas. Spending-wise, Lewis's deal [\$26 million, \$10.5 million of it guaranteed] raised eyebrows, but Ryan is already raving about his man-coverage abilities. Watson was a smart replacement for Thomas; he's a high-character veteran who will capably back up Jimmy Graham.

## THE CASE FOR ...

### Strong safety Kenny Vaccaro

It hasn't taken long for Vaccaro to make a sizable impact in a Saints secondary looking to rebound from a terrible 2012: The feisty and energetic first-round pick from Texas spent the preseason hitting everyone in sight, opponents and slightly perturbed teammates alike. New Orleans fans are going to love his intrepid playing style, and opponents are going to learn to keep track of him when they venture into his area. The 6' 1", 214-pound Vaccaro plays as if he's spring-loaded, with defensive coordinator Rob Ryan comparing him with a young Rodney Harrison. New Saints CB Keenan Lewis, late of the Steelers, likens his fearlessness to that of Troy Polamalu. "I nicknamed him *Tasmanian Devil*," says Lewis. "He flies around and chews things up. And we don't want him toning that down." The Saints may move Vaccaro all around in coverage, as a slot defender or back in the secondary where he packs a punch in run defense and has promising centerfield coverage skills. But he'll be out there somewhere, waiting to line up his next big hit and bring a little moxie to a New Orleans D that's in search of a substantial rebound.

—D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 7-9

**SEPT. 8** Atlanta **15** at Tampa Bay **22** Arizona **30** Miami [Mon]  
**OCT. 6** at Chicago **13** at New England **20** BYE **27** Buffalo  
**NOV. 3** at New York Jets **10** Dallas **17** San Francisco **21** at Atlanta [Thu]  
**DEC. 2** at Seattle [Mon] **8** Carolina **15** at St. Louis **22** at Carolina **29** Tampa Bay

**DANGER ZONE** Sandwiched between meetings with the NFC's emergent West Coast powers is an away date—on three days' rest—against the NFC South champs. At least there's extra prep time for the Seattle Monday-nighter.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 2

#### QB DREW BREES

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
422	63.0	5,177	43-19	96.3

#### WR MARQUES COLSTON

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
83	1,154	13.9	10

#### RB DARREN SPROLES

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
48	244	75	8

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 32

#### DE CAMERON JORDAN

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
67	8	0

#### LB WILL SMITH

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
58	6	0

#### CB KEENAN LEWIS (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
71	0	0

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION

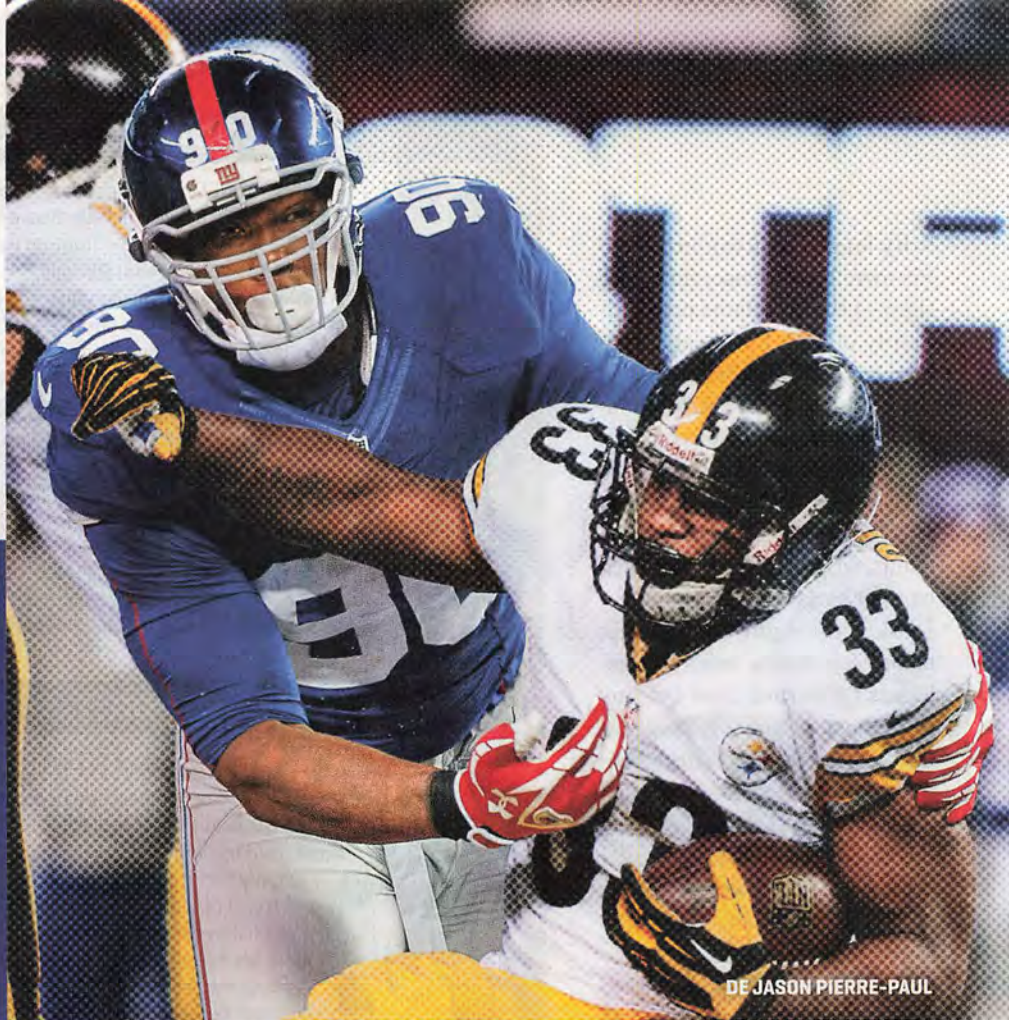


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New York  
GIANTS

6



DE JASON PIERRE-PAUL

→ JUSTIN TUCK was walking along the edge of an outdoor field at the Giants' headquarters on the second day of training camp, about an hour before an early-afternoon practice, when a voice among a pack of Big Blue-clad fans asked the defensive captain the perennial question: "How many sacks are you going to get this year, Justin?"

The fan paused, then shouted, "Fifteen sacks!" Tuck grinned.

The expectations for the Giants' defensive line have never dropped off, not on a team that's relied on a relentless front to win two Super Bowl titles in the past six years. Last season, when the unit's play slackened, putting pressure on an inconsistent secondary, New York ranked next to last in the league in total defense and missed the playoffs. There wasn't just one reason for the team's overall let-down, but the Giants' attitude is

For the Giants, a return to defensive excellence is all about keeping up with the times. Good thing, then, that this team ain't afraid to tinker

+  
BY  
JENNY  
VRENTAS

simple: Success in 2013 depends on reestablishing a presence up front.

"Everybody has seen the tape, all the stuff we could have stopped," says defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul. Pierre-Paul's recovery from June back surgery, which sidelined him for the entire preseason, is just the first of many questions facing the proud but reeling unit this season. Among the others: Can Tuck return to a Pro Bowl level of play? How will the Giants adjust to changing offensive trends, particularly in their division? (Hello, Chip Kelly!) And will the line restore an identity to the defense?

While the front office left the starting secondary intact and may lean on a committee approach at linebacker, they invested resources in the trenches, drafting defensive linemen with two of their top three picks: space-eating Ohio State tackle Johnathan Hankins in the second round and productive Texas

A&M pass rusher Damontre Moore in the third. Meanwhile they let go of two veterans, DE Osi Umenyiora and DT Chris Canty, and refortified the front by returning Mathias Kiwanuka to end from linebacker and adding two free-agent DTs: Cullen Jenkins, who has played in both 4-3 and 3-4 schemes, and Mike Patterson, with whom the Giants are familiar from his eight years with the Eagles.

Part of reestablishing a presence up front has meant experimenting. The formula for returning to defensive-line dominance, Tuck says, lies in evolving with the NFL's influx of college-style offenses, like the ones the Giants will face four times a year—the RG3-led Redskins and Kelly's Eagles. Versatility being key, defensive coordinator Perry Fewell has made sure that he has the personnel to fit his traditional 4-3 scheme, but he says the



unit will also be “very multiple.”

The Giants practiced these varied looks this summer, at times mixing in a 3-4 front, asking Tuck or Kiwanuka to stand up and swapping ends from side to side presnap based on the offensive formation. Jenkins, who can line up at end or tackle in any front, helps the Giants’ combinatorics.

Keep in mind, this is a team that has long demonstrated creativity up front, moving Tuck and Pierre-Paul all over the line and developing the so-called NASCAR defense that deployed four ends to rush the passer. This is just the next step in the evolution.

No matter which schemes or lineups New York uses, the team identified one top priority for its line: Stop the run. The Giants did not last year, when they yielded 129.1 rushing yards per game, which ranked in the bottom quarter of the NFL. Opponents were able to push the ball on the ground against the Giants’ front, which in turn limited opportunities for their prized pass rushers to tee off on the quarterback. Pierre-Paul, who starred with 16½ sacks in ’11, led the Giants with just 6½ last season. The team’s sack total was 33, which was 22nd in the league—and about one third fewer than during its Super Bowl XLVI season.

The Giants are not a one-dimensional team, not with quarterback Eli Manning and a perennially top 10 scoring offense on the other side of the ball. But just as the New York teams of the 1980s were built around their dominant linebackers, the franchise today depends on a dominant defensive line. Players use different words for the falloff last season—*disgusting* and *unacceptable*—but reestablishing a presence up front in 2013 would be something else: *team-changing*. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

**MARCH 11** Sign DT Cullen Jenkins (PHI)  
**MARCH 12** Cut DT Chris Canty (BAL); lose TE Martellus Bennett (CHI)  
**MARCH 14** Lose SS Kenny Phillips (PHI); sign CB Aaron Ross (JAX)  
**MARCH 27** Lose DE Osi Umenyiora (ATL), LB Chase Blackburn (CAR); re-sign SS Stevie Brown  
**APRIL 25** Draft OT Justin Pugh (Syracuse), DT Johnathan Hankins (Ohio State)  
**JULY 8** Extend WR Victor Cruz

**ANALYSIS** G.M. Jerry Reese is committed to building through the draft and with selective, modest free-agent signings, like Jenkins, a versatile DT, released by Philadelphia, who will fill Canty’s role for a reasonable price [\$3 million guaranteed]. Speaking of reasonable prices, Cruz, after three years of minimum salaries, jumped at an extension that is below the market for top WRs. The Giants don’t appear focused, however, on extending the expiring contract of Cruz’s receiver mate, Hakeem Nicks. Several veterans were allowed [encouraged?] to leave in free agency; this team wants its young players to play.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Wide receiver Rueben Randle

On offense, the Giants’ formula for their two most recent Super Bowl titles has boiled down to Eli Manning and a triple threat of WRs: Amani Toomer, Plaxico Burress and Steve Smith in Super Bowl XLII; Victor Cruz, Hakeem Nicks and Mario Manningham in XLVI. The latter group lost Manningham in free agency in spring 2012 and then enlisted the LSU receiver Randle in that year’s draft, hoping he could fill that void. Randle’s assimilation lagged early last season, but he made a strong case as the team’s most-improved player this preseason. Coordinator Kevin Gilbride called Randle “light-years” ahead of his rookie season, when he had just 19 catches. For his part, Randle admits that as a rookie, “I wasn’t understanding everything” in a complicated system. The light switched on late last year, though, and while Cruz and Nicks missed much of the off-season program, Randle made great strides. A smooth route runner with good hands, he has made improvements in reading coverages and adjusting his routes, critical in Gilbride’s system. If this progress translates to the regular season, he could be that missing piece in the Giants’ receiving trio. —J.V.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 9-7

**SEPT. 8** at Dallas **15** Denver **22** at Carolina **29** at Kansas City  
**OCT. 6** Philadelphia **10** at Chicago [Thu] **21** Minnesota [Mon] **27** at Philadelphia  
**NOV. 3** BYE **10** Oakland **17** Green Bay **24** Dallas  
**DEC. 1** at Washington **8** at San Diego **15** Seattle **22** at Detroit **29** Washington

**DANGER ZONE** Four NFC contenders and a cross-country trip—that feels like the formula for another second-half slide. The potential silver lining: Three of those games are at home (though that hasn’t always helped in the past).

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 14

#### QB ELI MANNING

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
321	59.9	3,948	26-15	87.2

#### WR HAKEEM NICKS

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
53	692	13.1	3

#### WR VICTOR CRUZ

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
86	1,092	12.7	10

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 31

#### DE JUSTIN TUCK

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
45	4	0

#### DE JASON PIERRE-PAUL

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
66	6½	1

#### FS ANTREL ROLLE

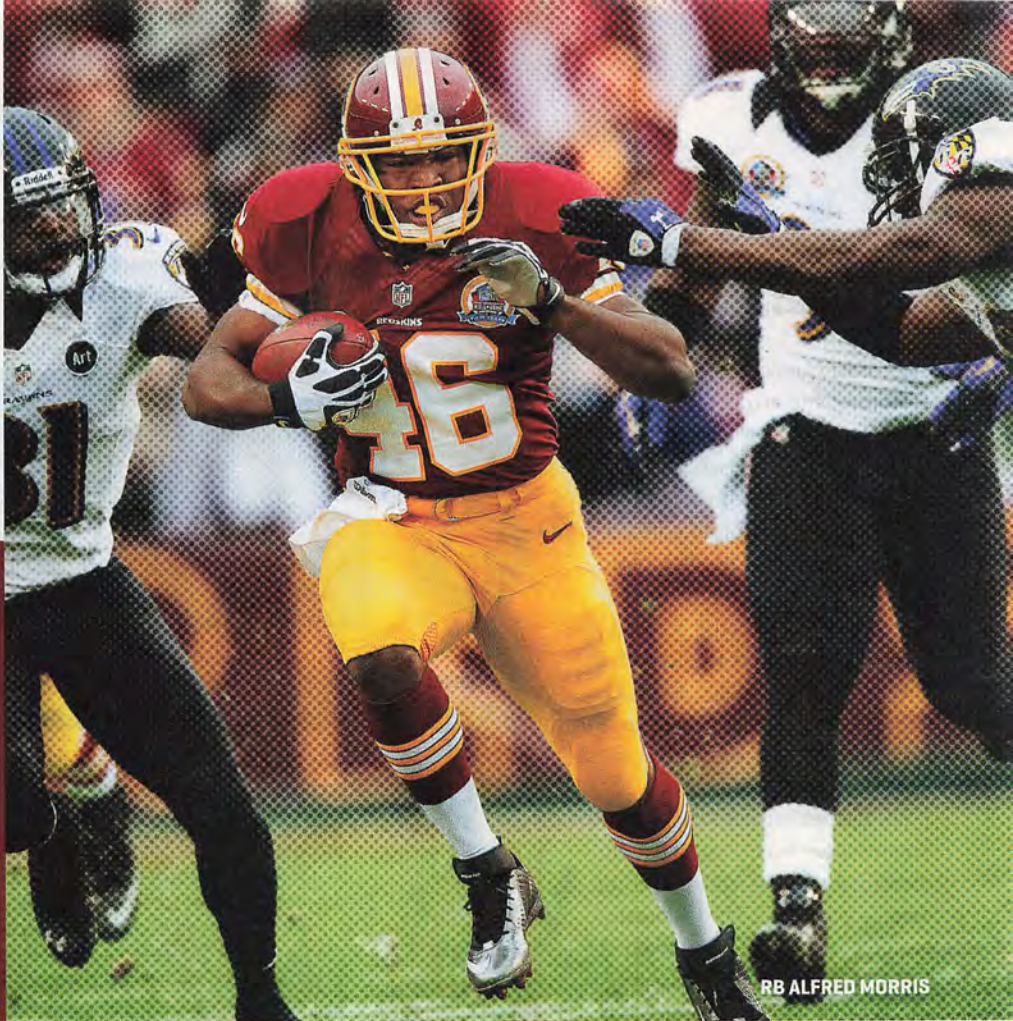
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
96	0	2



N

+  
Washington  
**REDSKINS**

7



RB ALFRED MORRIS

→ WHILE EVERY incremental update on Robert Griffin III's comeback from off-season ACL and LCL surgery has mesmerized greater Washington (and the planet, really), the Redskins' other irreplaceable offensive cog, running back Alfred Morris, went quietly back to work this summer, honing a game that has already exceeded all expectations.

Washington understandably fell under the thrall of RG3 mania last season, but Morris was a bigger revelation than the eventual NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year. Having traded a boatload to the Rams for the right to draft Griffin No. 2, the weight of a franchise was placed on the former Heisman winner's shoulders. Morris, by contrast, was a third-day pick (No. 173) from a no-name school, Florida Atlantic. Who knew?

All he did then was gain more

Recall, if you will: RG3 didn't revive the Redskins alone last year. Alfred Morris was, in fact, the bigger revelation, and he's not done surprising people

+  
**BY  
DON  
BANKS**

rushing yards (1,613) than anyone not named Adrian Peterson, break Clinton Portis's 2005 single-season Redskins rushing record and finish with 13 rushing TDs, trailing only the Texans' Arian Foster. In between, he had seven 100-yard games—the signature performance being a 33-carry, 200-yard, three-touchdown effort in a Week 17 showdown win over the Cowboys with the NFC East up for grabs.

**Despite having the third-best rookie rushing season in NFL history, Morris remains singularly unimpressed with himself:** He refuses to acknowledge that he's the team's lead back (he is); he dismisses all talk of having arrived as an NFL rusher (he has); and he still tools around in the trusty 1991 Mazda 626 that he's owned since his college days (he does, really).

"No position is secure," says Morris. "Any day, you can come

in and be replaced. My mind-set is, Once you start thinking like you're the starter then you're in a comfort zone. And once you're in a comfort zone, you can't get better. And if you're not getting better, you're getting worse. There's no in-between."

There is, in fact, room for improvement. Morris caught just 11 passes for 77 yards in 2012, and he made it a goal to give the Redskins a reason to keep him on the field on third downs, a task that fell to Roy Helu and then Evan Royster last year. The sight of Morris catching extra passes after practices in August became routine.

There, however, remain plenty of touches to be had on first and second down. **If the Redskins choose—as expected—to throttle back RG3's offensive load early in the season as he shakes off the rust, a guy who carried 351 times last year, including the playoffs,**



is a good bet to pick up the slack.

"If they want to ride these shoulders, ride them—I'm fine with that," says Morris, who spearheaded a rushing attack that led the NFL with 169.3 yards per game last season. "I can take the workload. Carries are nothing to me. Five or 40. . . . The first carry is the same as the last carry."

Coach Mike Shanahan has likely heard that before. He has a well-known track record of unearthing 1,000-yard backs, only to cycle through them faster than Tom Brady does hairstyles: Terrell Davis, Olandis Gary, Mike Anderson, Portis, Reuben Droughns and Tatum Bell, all of them 1,000-yard rushers under Shanahan. Of those guys, only Davis did it more than twice.

Morris's gift, the skill that prompts Shanahan's insistence that he will go down as one of the game's great runners? He gives nearly every play a chance of succeeding. His 5' 10", 218-pound frame is powerful, but he's also elusive enough to avoid contact and leave defenders grasping at air. According to a Redskins film study, **Morris was brought down by the first tackler only three times last season.**

"He's one of the few runners where the first guy never tackles him," says Shanahan. "When people do hit him, he bounces off. That's a very unusual trait."

And if anything, he's even more important to Washington's playoff hopes this season than last. Griffin isn't the only Redskin with a big second act in store.

"He came out of nowhere, but he's just going to get better this year," says fullback Darrel Young. "He doesn't have to say it, but I know it. And the Redskins know it. I think Shanahan has found his back." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- MARCH 11** Re-sign OG Kory Lichtensteiger
- MARCH 28** Sign LB Darryl Tapp (PHI)
- MARCH 29** Re-sign TE Fred Davis
- APRIL 26** Draft CB David Amerson (N.C. State), TE Jordan Reed (Florida)
- JUNE 12** Sign WR Donté Stallworth (NE)
- JULY 26** Lose DE Jarvis Jenkins to four-game suspension for substance-abuse violation

**ANALYSIS** Questions still linger about the decision to let RG3 play on a compromised leg and on perilous turf in last year's playoffs, resulting in serious ACL and LCL damage. Beyond breathless updates of his rehabilitation, Washington had an uncharacteristically quiet off-season, reaching one-year deals with multiple veterans (also: CB DeAngelo Hall, LB Nick Barnett), but deeming only Lichtensteiger worthy of a substantial investment. After years of profligate spending on players past their prime, the Redskins are rightly moving to a pay-as-they-go model with older players. This is a team that will grow with Griffin, assuming he is given more conservative care.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Outside linebacker Brian Orakpo

It's a given that the Redskins' season will hinge largely on whether RG3 remains in dual-threat form after off-season surgery on his right knee—but his isn't the only crucial comeback in Washington. Orakpo, who missed all but two games last season due to a torn left pectoral muscle, must resume terrorizing QBs and restore the pass rush. **After Orakpo went down in Week 2 last season, most of Washington's pass pressure disappeared with him.** The Skins had just 32 sacks, 23rd in the league, after bagging 41 in '11. In turn, too much of a burden was put on the secondary, which wound up ranked No. 30 in passing yards allowed (281.9 per game). Coach Mike Shanahan says Orakpo attacked the team's off-season program like a man possessed, and coordinator Jim Haslett cited improved finishing technique in predicting a sack total in the teens. Orakpo is eyeballing Comeback Player of the Year honors—but he'd happily share that with Griffin. If Washington's twin comebacks go that smoothly, the Redskins' season should be a four-month joy ride. —D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 10-6

- SEPT. 9** Philadelphia [Mon] **15** at Green Bay **22** Detroit **29** at Oakland
- OCT. 6** BYE **13** at Dallas **20** Chicago **27** at Denver
- NOV. 3** San Diego **7** at Minnesota [Thu] **17** at Philadelphia **25** San Francisco [Mon]
- DEC. 1** New York Giants **8** Kansas City **15** at Atlanta **22** Dallas **29** at New York Giants

**DANGER ZONE** A short-week trip to the Metrodome falls in the middle of their toughest stretch: three road games in four weeks, bookended by visits from the Bears and the 49ers. In this context, a visit from the Giants will be a relief.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 5

QB ROBERT GRIFFIN III					
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING	
258	65.6	3,200	20-5	102.4	

### RB ALFRED MORRIS

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
335	1,613	11	13

### WR PIERRE GARÇON

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
44	633	14.4	4

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 28

LB RYAN KERRIGAN		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
54	8½	1

### LB LONDON FLETCHER

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
139	3	5

### CB JOSH WILSON

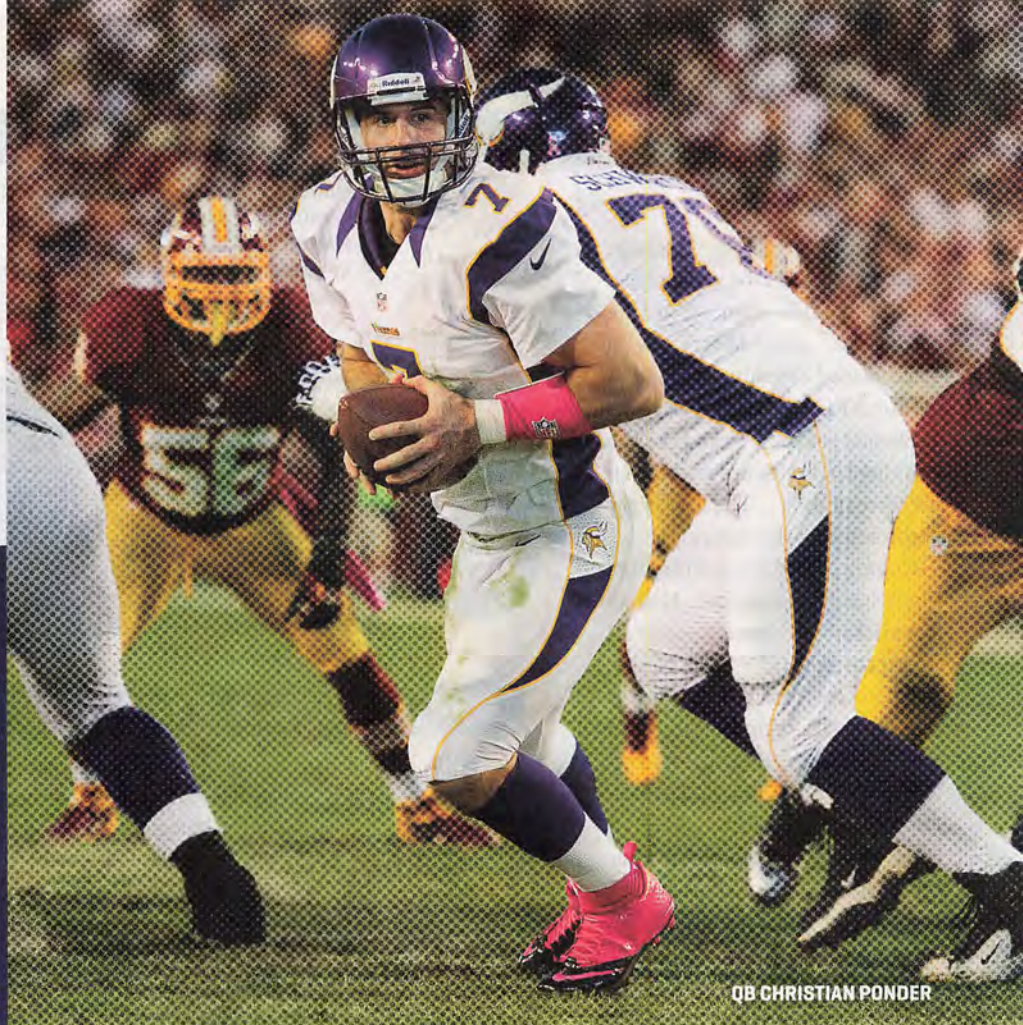
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
74	1	2



N

Minnesota  
VIKINGS

8



QB CHRISTIAN PONDER

→ THROUGH THE first two seasons of his NFL career, Christian Ponder has been a kind of quarterback Rorschach test—everyone sees something different when analyzing his potential.

Some focus on his athleticism, intelligence and arm strength, while others are disappointed by his hesitant play in the pocket, dubious decision making and accuracy issues. The 6' 2", 229-pound quarterback is either an emerging talent on the cusp of a breakout year, having turned a huge corner during the Vikings' surprise 4-0 playoff-berth-clinching run last December, or he's facing a cross-road season that could result in his losing the starting job.

Here's where we stand: With the clock ticking on the prime of incomparable running back Adrian Peterson, a much-improved corps of receivers and a veteran quar-

terback in Matt Cassel now on the sideline, a heightened sense of urgency exists in Minnesota. Ponder, 25, must prove he's the club's unquestioned No. 1 quarterback. "He does seem to be put under the microscope," says general manager Rick Spielman of Ponder, the team's first-round pick in 2011. "But the same things happened to [Giants two-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback] Eli Manning early on in New York. He had a lot of ups and downs in his second and third years, but that stopped when he won the Super Bowl in year four [2007]. You have to look at the whole picture, and we feel very confident that [Ponder] is progressing the way he should be."

BY  
DON  
BANKS

terback in Matt Cassel now on the sideline, a heightened sense of urgency exists in Minnesota. Ponder, 25, must prove he's the club's unquestioned No. 1 quarterback.

"He does seem to be put under the microscope," says general manager Rick Spielman of Ponder, the team's first-round pick in 2011. "But the same things happened to [Giants two-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback] Eli Manning early on in New York. He had a lot of ups and downs in his second and third years, but that stopped when he won the Super Bowl in year four [2007]. You have to look at the whole picture, and we feel very confident that [Ponder] is progressing the way he should be."

Spielman's support of Ponder may put him in the minority, but no one disputes how clutch the quarterback was in Week 17's showdown against Green Bay in the Metrodome, when the Vikings' once-

improbable wild-card hopes hung in the balance. Ponder led two crucial fourth-quarter scoring drives to give Minnesota a 37-34 lead, and with eventual league MVP Peterson rumbling for 199 yards, the Vikings held on to win, securing a return to the playoffs after finishing last in the NFC North in 2010 and '11. Ponder was unable to play in the Vikings-Packers rematch the following week in Green Bay because of a bruised triceps, and Minnesota went down without a fight, 24-10, in the NFC wild-card game.

"That [win in the first game] should be a stepping-stone," says Vikings coach Leslie Frazier. "It's something he can look back on and say, 'I know I can do this. I proved it.' I think we'll say that was the turning point in his career."

Ponder played well down the stretch last season, but it was still Peterson who carried the team to the playoffs on the strength of 2,097



rushing yards. That's why Ponder starts 2013 probably two bad games away from hearing calls for Cassel, and why he knows his strong final month didn't completely wipe away the doubts he stoked with a midseason slump in '12.

"In the middle of the season, I tried to force things, and I made decisions that probably weren't the smartest," Ponder says. "For me it was about finding that right balance, taking risks and throwing the ball downfield, but not forcing things that weren't there. Late in the year it was just a change of mind-set that I'm going to just go out and have fun with it. **I stopped overthinking things and just let it go, and it worked. That would help anyone's confidence.**"

But the Vikings knew that Ponder needed more than increased confidence this season. He needed better outside receiving weapons in order to take advantage of all the defenses that put eight and nine men in the box in an attempt to slow down Peterson.

Just days after a March trade that sent the talented but problematic Percy Harvin to Seattle, Minnesota signed veteran Greg Jennings to a five-year, \$45 million contract, and the following month drafted raw but gifted receiver and return man Cordarrelle Patterson out of Tennessee. With Pro Bowl tight end Kyle Rudolph always a favorite target, a healthy Jerome Simpson at receiver and the constant threat of Peterson in the backfield, Ponder should top his 28 completions of 20 or more yards in 2012, which was the lowest among NFC quarterbacks who started 16 games.

The Vikings need their quarterback to trust his talent. If he does that, the team will grow to trust him and the negative perceptions will fade away. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B+



\*IN LONDON

## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>MARCH 5</b>	Cut WR Michael Jenkins
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Trade WR Percy Harvin (SEA); re-sign OT Phil Loadholt
<b>MARCH 15</b>	Sign WR Greg Jennings (GB), QB Matt Cassel (KC)
<b>APRIL 12</b>	Cut CB Antoine Winfield
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft DT Sharrif Floyd (Florida), CB Xavier Rhodes (FSU), WR Cordarrelle Patterson (Tennessee)
<b>MAY 6</b>	Cut P Chris Kluwe
<b>JUNE 27</b>	Sign LB Desmond Bishop (GB)

**ANALYSIS** A jumbled off-season saw a mix of veteran and draft additions offset by notable losses. Harvin's seemingly constant rumbles of discontent—with the offense, with his QB, with his contract—forced a trade that, in the short term, looks wise given the WR's almost-immediate injury in Seattle. But Rhodes and Patterson are future-focused assets who should replace the production of Winfield and Harvin; and Floyd may have been the best value pick in the draft. Jennings and Bishop are the latest in a long line of ex-Packers who've defected to the Vikings, and each should provide instant upgrades.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Wide receiver Cordarrelle Patterson

When the Vikings drafted the 6' 2" 220-pounder No. 29 out of Tennessee, their hope was that he'd have an impact in the return game this season; on offense they'd give him only a scaled-down package of plays to learn as a receiver. Patterson proved he had step 1 down pat right away, **taking the first live NFL ball he touched 50 yards on a kick return against Houston in the preseason.** But he's developed faster than anticipated as a receiver, and now the expectation is that he can give Minnesota the deep, speedy threat it's lacked since Sidney Rice left town. With free-agent pickup Greg Jennings working the intermediate zones and tight end Kyle Rudolph emerging as a consistent option, the Vikings' passing game suddenly has the look of being far more varied than at any other time in coach Leslie Frazier's three-year tenure. Historically, wideouts have tended to be slow in acclimating to the NFL. This rookie wears number 84—a number familiar to Minnesotans. Randy Moss first wore it in 1998 as a rookie. And he didn't take long in setting the NFL afire. —D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 10-6

**SEPT. 8** at Detroit **15** at Chicago **22** Cleveland **29** Pittsburgh\*  
**OCT. 6** BYE **13** Carolina **21** at New York Giants [Mon] **27** Green Bay  
**NOV. 3** at Dallas **7** Washington [Thu] **17** at Seattle **24** at Green Bay  
**DEC. 1** Chicago **8** at Baltimore **15** Philadelphia **22** at Cincinnati **29** Detroit

**DANGER ZONE** Four straight dates with teams that had double-digit wins in '12 is daunting enough. But three of those games are at notoriously nasty stadiums, and the Vikes were 3-6 on the road last season.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 20

QB CHRISTIAN PONDER				
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
300	62.1	2,935	18-12	81.2

### RB ADRIAN PETERSON

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
348	2,097	40	13

### WR GREG JENNINGS (N)

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
36	366	10.2	4

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 16

DE JARED ALLEN		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
45	12	0

LB CHAD GREENWAY		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
148	3	1

FS HARRISON SMITH		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
104	1	3

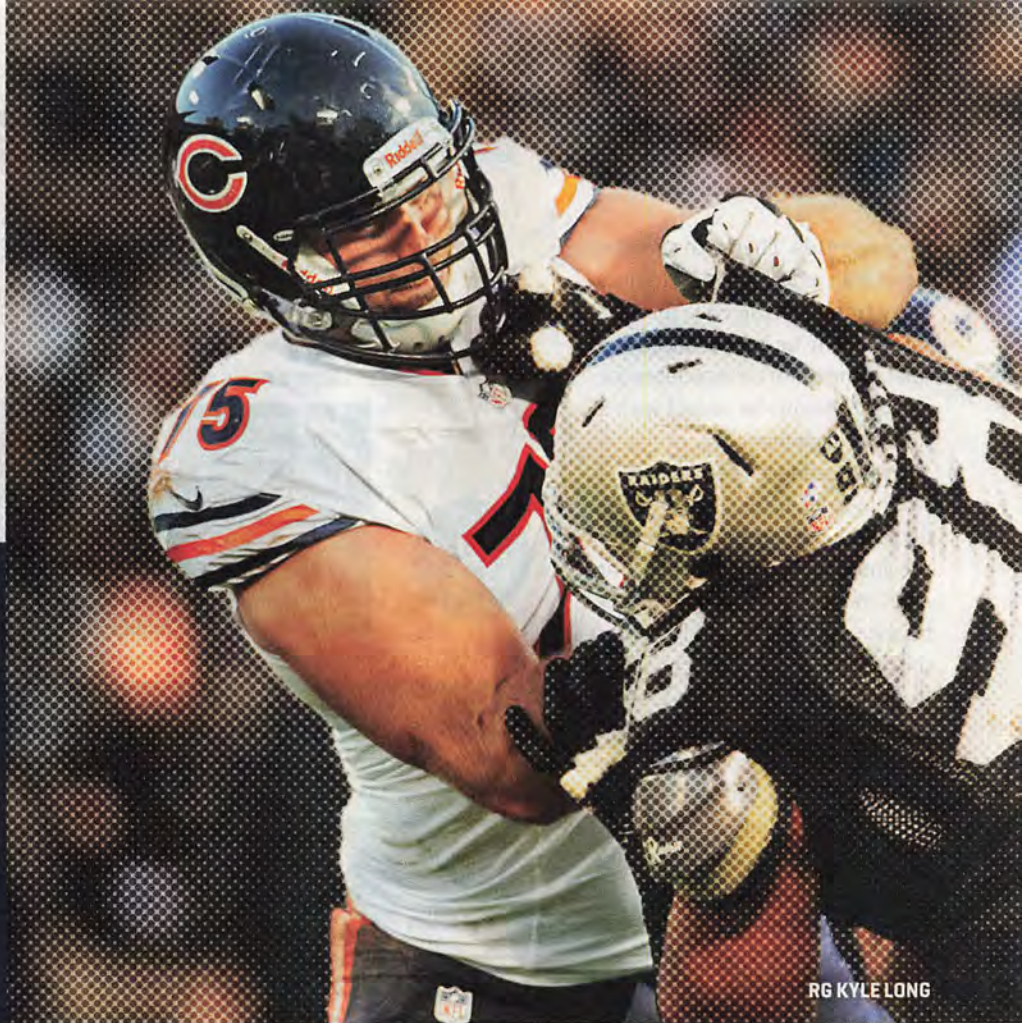
(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION



N

+  
Chicago  
BEARS

9



RG KYLE LONG

→ WHEN TIGHT end Martellus Bennett teased Phil Emery about the general manager's no-new-contracts edict at the outset of training camp, Emery was quick with a comeback.

"You're the reason nobody else is getting deals," Emery told Bennett, who had already signed a four-year, \$20.4 million free-agent pact during the off-season.

In an off-season of modest renewal for the Bears, the second-year G.M. has ambitiously toed the line between a roster rebuild and win-now mode. By making free-agency bids for established talent (Bennett and former Saints left tackle Jermon Bushrod) while simultaneously delaying decisions on several expiring contracts, **Emery is setting up Chicago for contention in 2013, while leaving open the option of a roster razing in '14.** It's not unlike the direction

Rebuild? Or make a run for it all? The seemingly on-the-brink Bears will go for the Lombardi. If it doesn't work out, they're well-positioned for a good gutting

+  
BY  
ROBERT  
KLEMKO

the Ravens took following their Super Bowl XLVII victory.

Emery has been willing to make hard decisions, the most notable of which involved Brian Urlacher, the face of the franchise for the last 13 years. The 35-year-old former NFL defensive player of the year became an unrestricted free agent in March, after earning a base salary of \$7.5 million in 2012. The Bears were offering a one-year, \$2 million deal for '13. Urlacher chose to move on and soon after retired. "The weight of that negotiation was not unfelt," says Emery. "I understood that if Brian didn't come back, there was going to be disappointment—on my part as well."

**Age (on both sides of the ball) and the offensive line are the two biggest enemies of a franchise that finished 10-6 and out of the postseason for the fifth time in six years.** Emery was especially

aggressive in spackling the industrial-sized cracks in front of quarterback Jay Cutler, adding Bushrod and left guard Matt Slauson through free agency, and by drafting Oregon's Kyle Long with the 20th pick. Long has been one of the pleasant surprises of the preseason, moving plenty of bodies for backs Matt Forte and Michael Bush in new coach Marc Trestman's West Coast offense, which will run the ball more than most assume. (Whatever your philosophy, you would run the ball more often given the Bears' recent, disastrous history of pass protection; they've graded in the bottom five of the league in each of the last three years.) Long, the second NFL-playing son of Hall of Fame defensive end Howie Long (Chris Long is a defensive end for the Rams), takes on an especially critical role at right guard, with the right tackle position in flux:



J'Marcus Webb may have lost the starting job to another rookie, Jordan Mills, a fifth-rounder.

At least the youngsters are pushing for jobs on offense. Lance Briggs will replace Urlacher as the primary defensive play-caller, but it's unclear how much longer he or his fellow thirtysomething brethren have left in navy blue. Cornerbacks Charles Tillman, 32, and Tim Jennings, 29, will each look to negotiate new contracts after the season. Emery brought in former Bronco D.J. Williams on a one-year deal to replace Urlacher, but the front office would love to see second-round pick Jon Bostic assert himself. So far, the reviews have been mixed; Bostic has struggled to get off blocks in the run game, but he excels in space, bringing highlight-reel hits. Plus, Emery adds, "it was very important that if we were going to take a linebacker in the second round, we got somebody who could immediately fill in all three spots."

Should Bostic nestle into the middle linebacker spot in Mel Tucker's 4-3 defense in place of Williams, who dealt with a calf injury in preseason, he'll twice meet Vikings running back and 2012 MVP Adrian Peterson. That could look ugly the first time around, but **it's drafted players like Bostic and Long—young and rough around the edges—whom Emery would prefer to make a living off of rather than free agents.** Certainly, he's seen the success That Team to the North has enjoyed abiding by that philosophy.

"With the current cap model, draft picks working out is the way to go," he says. "The cost of the younger players is lower. If you want cap flexibility to bring in key dynamic [veterans], that approach allows you to do that." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>DEC. 31</b>	Fire coach Lovie Smith
<b>JAN. 16</b>	Hire coach Marc Trestman [CFL], O coordinator Aaron Kromer [NO]
<b>JAN. 17</b>	Fire O coordinator Mike Tice
<b>JAN. 18</b>	Lose O coordinator Rod Marinelli [DAL]; hire D coordinator Mel Tucker [JAX]
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Sign TE Martellus Bennett [NYG], OT Jermon Bushrod [NO]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft OG Kyle Long [Oregon], LB Jon Bostic [Florida]
<b>MAY 22</b>	Lose LB Brian Urlacher (retirement)
<b>JUNE 26</b>	Lose DE Israel Idonije [DET]

**ANALYSIS** Management felt the offense and the team environment had grown stale under Smith; Trestman will try to reenergize both. Second-year G.M. Phil Emery's no-contract-extensions-this-year decree has been telling. That, combined with his allowing Urlacher to retire, indicates it's "show me" time in Chicago. Cutler will have important additions to help his contract drive in Bushrod, Long and Bennett. If he's negotiating a lucrative extension in February, it will be because those new assets paid off—for Cutler and for the Bears.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Quarterback Jay Cutler

The Chicago media called it a throwmance: Cutler to Brandon Marshall, 194 times. Nearly half of the QB's attempts went to his new No. 1 target. The good news is that a WR led the Bears in catches for the first time since Cutler arrived in 2009. The bad news is that one-dimensional offenses don't win titles. [Marshall was on the receiving end of 48 of Cutler's 81 completions during a 1-5 late-season free fall that cost Chicago a playoff berth.] New coach Marc Trestman, formerly of the Montreal Alouettes, is the perfect remedy for what ailed the Bears' passing game. **Last season in the CFL three of the top 12 leaders in receiving yards were Alouettes, and in each of the past two years Trestman's teams boasted a pair of players among the league's 10 or so 1,000-yard WRs.** To go hand in hand with the breaking of bad habits, new TE Martellus Bennett will be a useful hot read for a QB who was sacked 38 times in '12 and who hasn't enjoyed a proficient pass-catching tight end since '10. Add to that an O-line revamp and the maturation of second-year WR Alshon Jeffery, and it's a gimme that Cutler will improve on his middle-of-the-road 81.3 passer rating from '12.

—R.K.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 10-6

**SEPT. 8** Cincinnati **15** Minnesota **22** at Pittsburgh **29** at Detroit  
**OCT. 6** New Orleans **10** New York Giants (Thu) **20** at Washington **27** BYE  
**NOV. 4** at Green Bay (Mon) **10** Detroit **17** Baltimore **24** at St. Louis  
**DEC. 1** at Minnesota **9** Dallas (Mon) **15** at Cleveland **22** at Philadelphia **29** Green Bay

**DANGER ZONE** This span—visiting two defending division champs and hosting the Lombardi-hoisting Ravens—is treacherous enough on its own. That it precedes a stretch run largely on the road makes it even more vital.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

**OFFENSE** 2012 RANK: 28

**QB JAY CUTLER**

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
255	58.8	3,033	19-14	81.3

**RB MATT FORTE**

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
248	1,094	44	6

**WR BRANDON MARSHALL**

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
118	1,508	12.8	11

**DEFENSE** 2012 RANK: 5

**DE JULIUS PEPPERS**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
39	11½	0

**LB LANCE BRIGGS**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
103	1½	2

**CB CHARLES TILLMAN**

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
86	0	3



# N

## Philadelphia EAGLES

# 10



WR DESEAN JACKSON

→ THERE ARE few guarantees in the NFL, but write this one down and take it to the bank: No matter who lines up at quarterback during this season of dramatic change for the Eagles—Michael Vick, Nick Foles or even fourth-round pick Matt Barkley—the real star of the show will not be an individual but rather Chip Kelly's unconventional offense.

The up-tempo, spread-formation scheme that the new coach brought east from Oregon, where his Ducks won big playing fast-break football, is versatile and varied, and it thrives on quick adjustments at the line depending on what an opposing defense shows. Boiled down, it's matchup football, designed to create and exploit mismatches.

The first new Philadelphia head coach of this century, however, is weary of the offensive-guru label that has ultimately rung hollow when applied to other college

Ducks... Eagles... They're both going to fly in Chip Kelly's no-oxygen attack. Thing is, these Birds are of a different feather for the rookie coach

BY  
DON  
BANKS

coaches trying their hand at the pros. (See: Spurrier, Steve.) And he downplays the notion that the NFL will find any of what he does particularly novel or revolutionary; from his viewpoint, there's nothing really new or untried in football.

Kelly's players see it differently. "He runs plays that we've never seen before—that's the hardest part of stopping them," says outside linebacker Connor Barwin, who Philly signed from Houston in free agency. "[He] puts you in space and spreads you out, which turns into a lot more matchups all over the field. It'll be fun to watch, but it's not going to be fun to try and stop."

You can't pigeonhole Kelly's offense, except that it won't look traditional—or much like the West Coast attack that departed Eagles coach Andy Reid featured for the past 14 seasons. There exists a misperception that the Kelly Way is a pass-happy, wide-open attack,

but the stats from Oregon don't bear that out. He loves to run the ball out of the spread, attacking defensive gaps, and the Ducks stayed on the ground 62.5% of the time during Kelly's tenure as coach, a rate he can't possibly replicate in the NFL.

Kelly's forte, rather, is his ability to use plays and unorthodox personnel packages to keep a defense off-balance, which should put Eagles playmakers such as running back LeSean McCoy, receiver DeSean Jackson and rookie tight end Zach Ertz in space with room to run. Philadelphia is rarely expected to huddle or line up under center, and formations will vary from the shotgun to the pistol to two-tight-end sets, with backs motioning out wide at times. And yes, there'll be some read-option sprinkled in as well.

It's an offense that is built to suit the strengths of the players at Kelly's disposal, and to do that quickly,



before opponents have a chance to breathe. His offense ran an average of 79, 73 and 81 plays a game from 2010 through '12. By comparison, the '12 Patriots, with their own no-huddle offense, averaged almost 75 plays per game, more than any team in nearly 20 years.

In addition to pushing the tempo, Kelly's offense demands that the quarterback make snap decisions and good presnap reads. What it *doesn't* require—as Kelly has emphasized—is that he be a runner, like those in the read-option. Vick, the most mobile of his QBs, showed the best balance of mobility and pocket passing in the preseason, and he was named the starter for Week 1. But Foles and Barkley could each see starting stints this season too, with Kelly game-planning around their different skill sets.

"[His offense] forces me to make quick decisions," says Barkley. "While I have fewer responsibilities in terms of checks at the line—it's too fast for that—after the snap I have more options than normal, even in the running game."

What remains to be seen is whether Kelly has the right personnel in year one to execute the offense the way he wants to run it. Season-ending knee injuries to receivers Jeremy Maclin and Arrelious Benn, not to mention the locker-room-rocking Riley Cooper controversy, didn't help Kelly speed the implementation of his plan.

"You'll see some similarities to what he did at Oregon, but it's Chip's offense," says Barkley, who competed against Kelly's Ducks at USC. "He's smart enough to figure out how to make it work in this league, just like he's made it work wherever he's been. He understands it's not just the plays themselves, it's the scheme and how you work it. He's definitely the reason it's going to work here." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

A-

## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>DEC. 31</b>	Fire coach Andy Reid
<b>JAN. 16</b>	Hire coach Chip Kelly [Oregon]
<b>FEB. 7</b>	Hire D coordinator Bill Davis [CLE]
<b>FEB. 8</b>	Hire O coordinator Pat Shurmur [CLE]
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Cut CB Nnamdi Asomugha
<b>MARCH 14</b>	Sign LB Connor Barwin [HOU]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft OT Lane Johnson [Oklahoma], TE Zach Ertz [Stanford], QB Matt Barkley [USC]
<b>JULY 27</b>	Lose WR Jeremy Maclin [Injury]

**ANALYSIS** Kelly is easily the NFL's most interesting off-season acquisition. Maclin's loss stings, but WRs Jason Avant and Riley Cooper, and TEs Ertz and James Casey, will fill the void. A restructuring of Michael Vick's contract secured the QB's position as the likely starter, since he pockets \$3.5 million up front. In front of Vick, Johnson's athleticism improves the O-line. Although Barkley will see limited time at most in 2013, the Eagles rave about his instincts. On defense Barwin is a difference maker from a free-agent market that offered few.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Outside linebacker Trent Cole



The Eagles' transition from a wide-nine 4-3 defense to a 3-4 under new coordinator Bill Davis has several pressure points that bear watching, but none carry a greater risk than Cole, the career DE who's switching to a stand-up right OLB spot. After eight seasons of lining up with his hand in the dirt, and with a team-high 71 sacks in that span, Cole is being asked to view the QB from a new vantage point. First impression: He enjoys the freedom of the new role but says it's made him feel like "an experienced rookie" at times, with mistakes resulting from playing in more space than he's used to. It's unlikely that Cole will be asked to drop into coverage often; instead he'll be the Eagles' rush LB, expected to set the edge or get upfield after the passer. It's a job that will take time for the 6'3" 270-pounder to acclimate to, but he's athletic enough to handle it. "I've watched James Harrison, DeMarcus Ware," says Cole, and "I like how they get to set the edge. I love that I'll be wide open and I can do whatever I want. I can't worry about anything. I've just got to be relentless." —D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 4-12

**SEPT. 9** at Washington (Mon) **15** San Diego **19** Kansas City (Thu) **29** at Denver  
**OCT. 6** at New York Giants **13** at Tampa Bay **20** Dallas **27** New York Giants  
**NOV. 3** at Oakland **10** at Green Bay **17** Washington **24** BYE  
**DEC. 1** Arizona **8** Detroit **15** at Minnesota **22** Chicago **29** at Dallas

**DANGER ZONE** Along with Tennessee, the Eagles are one of the two teams that play an NFL-maximum three straight road games. Waiting when they return to Philly: a pair of key division showdowns. Welcome to the NFL, Chip Kelly.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 15

QB MICHAEL VICK				
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
204	58.1	2,362	12-10	78.1

### RB LESEAN MCCOY

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
200	840	54	5

### WR DESEAN JACKSON

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
45	700	15.6	2

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 15

DE FLETCHER COX		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
39	5½	0

### LB CONNOR BARWIN (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
44	3	0

### CB CARY WILLIAMS (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
75	1	4

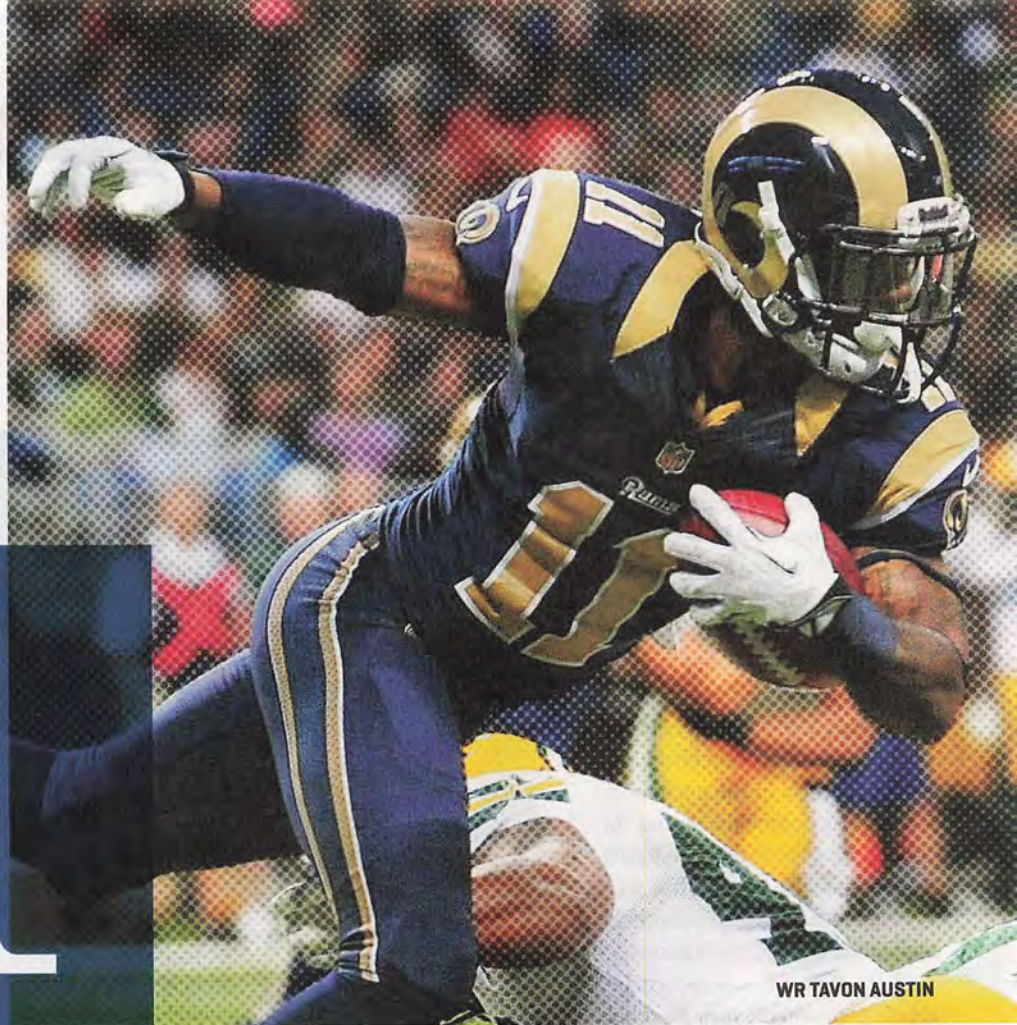
(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION



N

St. Louis  
**RAMS**

11



WR TAVON AUSTIN

→ LAST SEASON, as quarterback Sam Bradford struggled to bond with a crew of young Rams receivers, the long ball went dormant. Despite an arm well-suited to going deep, Bradford was 26th in the league in yards per attempt (a measly 6.72 per throw), occasionally making a downfield connection with rookie Chris Givens but mostly living in the middle of the field with Danny Amendola and safety-valve throws.

That all changed in free agency and on draft day. And training camp confirmed just what St. Louis brass thought it had in two new players: tight end Jared Cook and West Virginia slot receiver—utility weapon Tavon Austin—but mostly with Austin.

Over the last month or so the team has grown confident Cook will easily replace Amendola's sure-handedness in the middle of

Quarterback Sam Bradford suffered from a big-play problem in 2012. The solution—a most excellent and effective one—comes in a small package

BY  
PETER  
KING

the field. The former Titan had a tremendous camp, showing the catch radius of Jeremy Shockey in his prime and the athleticism downfield of today's Jimmy Graham. **Need a star tight end in fantasy football? Cook, barring an injury, will not let you down.**

Austin, however, showed signs of being the kind of singular weapon that no other player in the 2013 draft can be, even as a 5' 8", 176-pound mite. (The closest thing, Minnesota's Cordarrelle Patterson, does not have Austin's quickness.) As he ran short curls and deep go routes with equal speed in training camp, one had to wonder, the way he stopped on the eight-yard curl, for instance: How can a man break that fast when turning to the quarterback? And how can a defender adjust to it? The way he ran on deep stuff made it obvious that he'll be a tough match for

the fastest corners in football.

One play, in particular, showed how serious a challenge Austin could give defenses this year. Lining up in the slot on a hot St. Louis afternoon, with veteran cornerback Cortland Finnegan a couple of yards off him, Austin sprinted forward at the snap of the ball, Finnegan pedaling furiously in reverse. When Austin stopped after eight yards, Finnegan continued backpedaling a couple of steps; he simply couldn't break in time. Bradford targeted Austin just as the receiver turned around to look for the ball, and it was an easy 12-yard completion. Afterward Finnegan said, "If I think he's going to do that little eight-yard curl and I play him tight, then I might be able to stop it. But if he reads that, he can blow past me, and then he's off for a deep one, and there's no way I can catch up after



I've committed to the eight-yard route. He's going to be a headache [to cover]."

Austin has been careful in his first few months as a pro to stay in his rookie lane. No outlandish quotes, no Chad Johnson-like predictions. He wants to fit in, and he doesn't want to give any defenses the I-will-dominate bulletin-board material that many young players come with, even if he did earn that right as the Swiss Army Knife of offensive weapons in college. (He caught 14 balls for 215 yards against Baylor; he rushed for 344 yards in his first-ever game at running back, against Oklahoma; and he returned kicks for touchdowns in his freshman and senior years.)

"The thing I've learned in my short time here, I have to give credit to Danny Amendola for," Austin said one August day during camp. "I watched a lot of tape on Danny and how he played the slot here, and I saw he ran all his routes at full speed. Especially on long drives, I can tell you that's hard to do. But Danny ran every route the same. So that's something I'm going to do. Make every route the same. No tip toeing."

The difference between the pros and college, Austin believes (beyond playing his home games on the fast track of the Jones Dome in St. Louis), will be his ability to get off the bump at the line of scrimmage quickly so the quarterback doesn't have to wait to make a decision on which receiver he's targeting. "That's the thing I'm working hard at—getting away from man coverage at the line—but I think I'll be able to," he says.

"I wasn't much for studying in college, but I did love studying football."

Music to Bradford's ears. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

A-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

- FEB. 7** NFL reinstates D coordinator Gregg Williams; Williams leaves (TEN)  
**FEB. 15** Hire Tim Walton as D coordinator  
**MARCH 13** Sign TE Jared Cook (TEN)  
**MARCH 14** Lose WR Danny Amendola (NE)  
**MARCH 15** Lose WR Brandon Gibson (MIA), RB Steven Jackson (ATL)  
**MARCH 16** Lose FS Craig Dahl (SF)  
**MARCH 22** Sign LT Jake Long (MIA)  
**APRIL 25** Draft WR Tavon Austin (West Virginia), LB Alec Ogletree (Georgia)

**ANALYSIS** Cook was highly coveted for his athleticism (he could be a second WR) and landed himself a top-of-market contract (\$35.1 million, \$19 million of it guaranteed). He and the versatile Austin will line up everywhere, offsetting the loss of the injury-prone Amendola. Long, a former No. 1 draft pick, chose the Rams over the Dolphins for similar (or less, it's believed) money; that's good for the team image. And the departed Jackson's fate was sealed when the Rams allowed him to void his final contract year—a graceful exit for both sides.

## THE CASE FOR...

### The secondary

The Rams had been waiting for a pass rush since 2008, when they drafted DE Chris Long No. 2. It took four years, but that plan finally came to fruition in '12: Long and fellow end Robert Quinn ('11, first round) combined for 22 sacks, and last season's top pick, DT Michael Brockers, became the kind of interior force that drove offenses to pay more attention to the inside rusher and less to the outside guys. If CB Janoris Jenkins (left) can stay on the straight and narrow, the Rams have the secondary to survive in a division that features games against Colin Kaepernick, Russell Wilson and Carson Palmer six times a year. Jenkins played opportunistically and inconsistently in '12, scoring four TDs on returns but brain-locking at times. He missed one game for violating team rules. The Rams wanted him to train in St. Louis in the off-season; he stayed in Florida, another letdown. Jenkins might just be the kind of player from whom you get four years on the rookie contract and whom you pass on when his deal expires, but for now he and Cortland Finnegan make a good pair for a Jeff Fisher D: physical, risk-taking CBs who give the Rams a chance at big game-turning plays. —P.K.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 7-8-1

- SEPT. 8** Arizona **15** at Atlanta **22** at Dallas **26** San Francisco (Thu)  
**OCT. 6** Jacksonville **13** at Houston **20** at Carolina **28** Seattle (Mon)  
**NOV. 3** Tennessee **10** at Indianapolis **17** BYE **24** Chicago  
**DEC. 1** at San Francisco **8** at Arizona **15** New Orleans **22** Tampa Bay **29** at Seattle

**DANGER ZONE** The Rams had better take care of business at home in their opener before a demanding pair of road trips and a short week to prepare for the NFC champion Niners. October doesn't get much easier.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 23

#### QB SAM BRADFORD

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
328	59.5	3,702	21-13	82.6

#### TE JARED COOK (N)

REC	YARDS	AVG	TD
44	523	11.9	4

#### WR TAVON AUSTIN (R)

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
114	1,289	11.3	17

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 14

#### DE CHRIS LONG

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
33	11½	0

#### LB JAMES LAURINAITIS

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
142	1½	2

#### CB JANORIS JENKINS

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
73	0	4

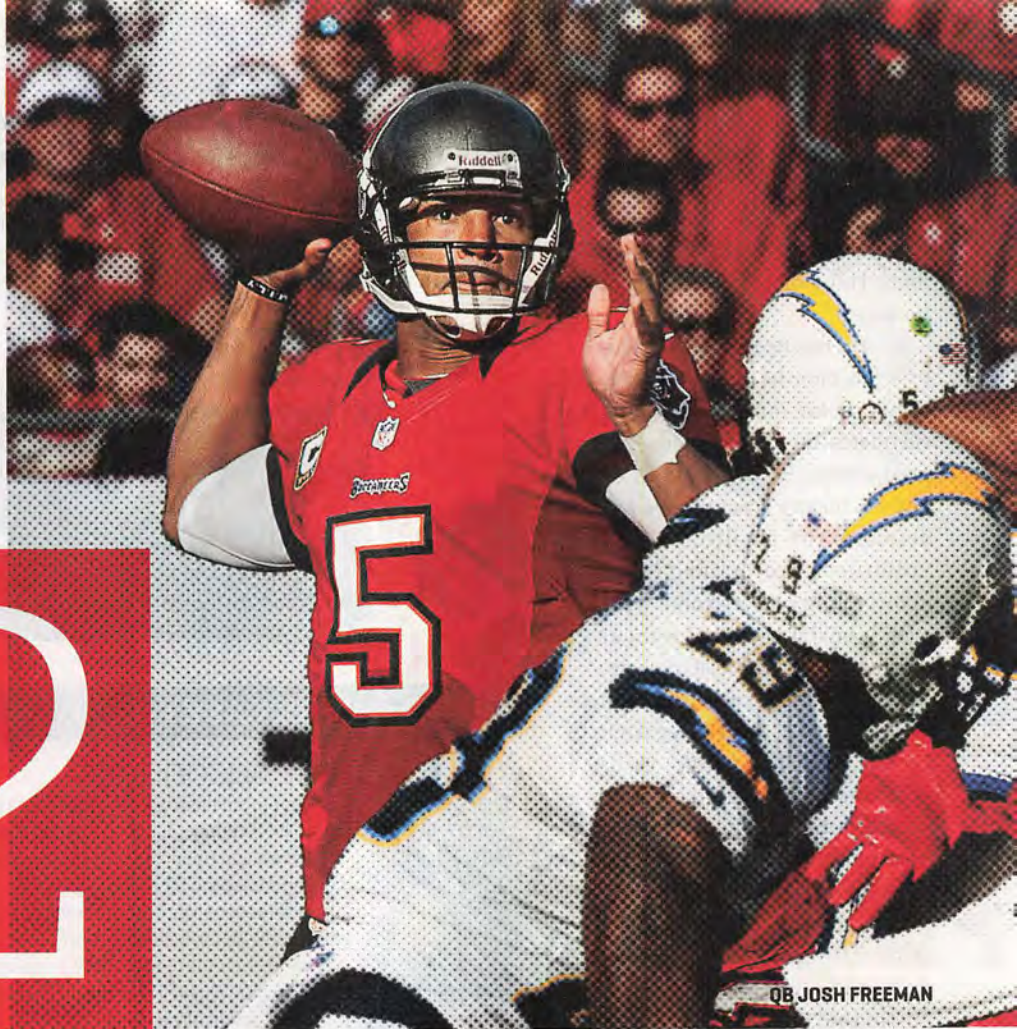
(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION  
(R) ROOKIE—  
COLLEGE STATS



N

+  
Tampa Bay  
**BUCCANEERS**

12



QB JOSH FREEMAN

→ **HERE'S THE paradox** fifth-year quarterback Josh Freeman faces in Tampa Bay this season: The 25-year-old is likely to set several career franchise passing records in 2013, but how likely is it that he will still be Tampa Bay's starter next year?

You can make statistics say almost anything you want them to, and Freeman's cut both ways. As he enters his pivotal contract season with the Bucs, is he the playmaking quarterback who led Tampa Bay to a surprising 6-4 start a year ago under new head coach Greg Schiano, throwing 21 touchdowns and just seven interceptions in that stretch? Or is he the inconsistent passer who tossed 10 of his 17 picks in three Bucs losses, the last two of which were killer four-interception showings against the Rams and the Saints in December?

**The pass defense has been addressed in a huge way. The pass offense, though? It's time for Josh Freeman to make that Eli-like leap**

+  
**BY  
DON  
BANKS**

Freeman's breakthrough 2010 season (25 TD passes, six interceptions) was followed by a subpar '11 (16 TDs, 22 INTs), a season that unfolded with roughly the same streaky pattern as '12 would. That's why the Bucs have said contract-extension talks will not begin until the end of the season. To be fair, Freeman is further along as an NFL quarterback than he gets credit for, but he hasn't arrived either—and that's why there's so much on the line for him and his team.

"Josh took a huge step last year," insists Schiano. "But now he has to take that next step to where we need him to be. I think he can do it this year, and when he takes that next step, we take that next step."

Tampa Bay's drafting 6' 6", 232-pound North Carolina State quarterback Mike Glennon in the third round this spring could be perceived as a sign of the fran-

chise's lack of belief in Freeman. There has been no quarterback controversy, however. For a team that hasn't made the playoffs since 2007 and hasn't won a postseason game since its lone Super Bowl title in '03, this is a very big year, and the Bucs will let their hopes ride on Freeman's shoulders.

"There is a lot of significance on this season," says Freeman. "Maybe it's my last year [here]. I want to go out and be a franchise quarterback and make my mark in this league. This is by far the most talented team we've had."

That's true, and the talent the Bucs have stockpiled puts them on the fringes of the postseason discussion. Tampa Bay's pass defense was abysmal last year—their 297.4 yards allowed is the second most in NFL history—and that had more to do with the team's 7-9 record than Freeman's three worst games did. So Tampa Bay went on



a spending spree to dramatically upgrade the secondary, signing Pro Bowl free-agent safety Dashon Goldson away from San Francisco, swinging the blockbuster trade for Jets cornerback Darrelle Revis and using their top remaining draft pick, a second-rounder, on Mississippi State cornerback Johnthan Banks. Tampa Bay's front seven remains a strength, as the rushing defense ranked No. 1 in the league (82.5 yards) last season.

Helping Freeman's chances is the fact that this will be his second consecutive season under offensive coordinator Mike Sullivan, the former Giants quarterbacks coach who helped mold Eli Manning's game. **The Bucs have burned through three offensive coordinators and four quarterbacks coaches in Freeman's five seasons, and Sullivan says Freeman's game looks smoother because of his increased familiarity with the offense.**

"Josh has been on a roller coaster here," says Bucs general manager Mark Dominik. "And I understand that from the outside there's a lot of uncertainty about him. But we know how much his being in Mike Sullivan's offense a second year will mean for his game. That continuity will make a difference."

On offense, with standout second-year running back Doug Martin, receivers Vincent Jackson and Mike Williams, and the expected return to health of Pro Bowl guards Carl Nicks and Davin Joseph, Freeman doesn't have to be the whole show.

"All arrows are pointing up right now, and I think he's going to handle this year fine," says Schiano. "But until you do it, it's not reality. There's no better example than last year's Super Bowl champs, right? [Ravens quarterback Joe] Flacco did it, and Baltimore paid him for it. We should all have that issue." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

A-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>MARCH 13</b>	Sign FS Dashon Goldson (SF)
<b>MARCH 14</b>	Lose OT Jeremy Trueblood (WAS)
<b>MARCH 15</b>	Trade WR Arrelious Benn (PHI)
<b>MARCH 16</b>	Lose DE Michael Bennett (SEA)
<b>APRIL 21</b>	Trade for CB Darrelle Revis (NYJ)
<b>APRIL 26</b>	Draft CB Johnthan Banks (Miss. St.), QB Mike Glennon (N.C. State)
<b>APRIL 27</b>	Trade RB LeGarrette Blount for RB Jeff Demps (NE)
<b>MAY 8</b>	Lose FS Ronde Barber (retirement)
<b>JUNE 10</b>	Trade for OG Gabe Carimi (CHI)

**ANALYSIS** The Bucs' off-season maneuvering will be judged on the performance of their secondary. Goldson chose Tampa over several suitors and was rewarded handsomely [\$41.25 million, \$22 million guaranteed]; Revis's contract average of \$16 million per year zooms past the established market (although his unique no-guarantee deal sets up potential discontent, a staple of his past); and Tampa further upgraded the unit through the draft, using its highest pick on Banks. That's one aggressive (and effective) off-season.

## THE CASE FOR ...

### The secondary

If new cornerback Darrelle Revis (left) recovers fully from last September's torn ACL and is again inhabiting Revis Island, Tampa's secondary won't be recognizable. That's a good thing. An April trade for the former Jet was the headline move in a near total makeover of the NFL's worst secondary, and the Bucs intend to use their new hire's shutdown skills in order to play a more aggressive style of D—something right out of Rex Ryan's daring playbook. Revis, who hasn't appeared in any preseason games, says that, when he returns, coach Greg Schiano will ask him to blanket each opponent's No. 1 WR while rolling coverage to the opposite side of the field, where the likes of two-time Pro Bowl FS Dashon Goldson, SS Mark Barron (a 2012 first-round pick) and CB Johnthan Banks (second round) are well-positioned to create matchup problems. **In a division featuring receivers Roddy White, Julio Jones, Marques Colston and Steve Smith, Revis will have little time to ease back into dominating form, but teammates expect nothing less.** "You don't [trade for] Revis to play him over the top," says Goldson. "You let him do what he does. Whenever he comes back, he's going to have to be Darrelle Revis." —D.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 7-9

<b>SEPT. 8</b>	at New York Jets	<b>15</b>	New Orleans	<b>22</b>	at New England	<b>29</b>	Arizona		
<b>OCT. 6</b>	BYE	<b>13</b>	Philadelphia	<b>20</b>	at Atlanta	<b>24</b>	Carolina [Thu]		
<b>NOV. 3</b>	at Seattle	<b>11</b>	Miami	<b>17</b>	Atlanta	<b>24</b>	at Detroit		
<b>DEC. 1</b>	at Carolina	<b>8</b>	Buffalo	<b>15</b>	San Francisco	<b>22</b>	at St. Louis	<b>29</b>	at New Orleans

**DANGER ZONE** To make their first playoff appearance in six years the Bucs will need to be in a strong position entering the closing weeks, when they face the 49ers at home, then a pair of troublesome tests on the road.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 9

#### QB JOSH FREEMAN

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
306	54.8	4,065	27-17	81.6

#### RB DOUG MARTIN

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
319	1,454	49	12

#### WR VINCENT JACKSON

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
72	1,384	19.2	8

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 29

#### DT GERALD MCCOY

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
30	5	0

#### CB DARRELLE REVIS (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
11	0	1

#### FS DASHON GOLDSON (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
66	0	3

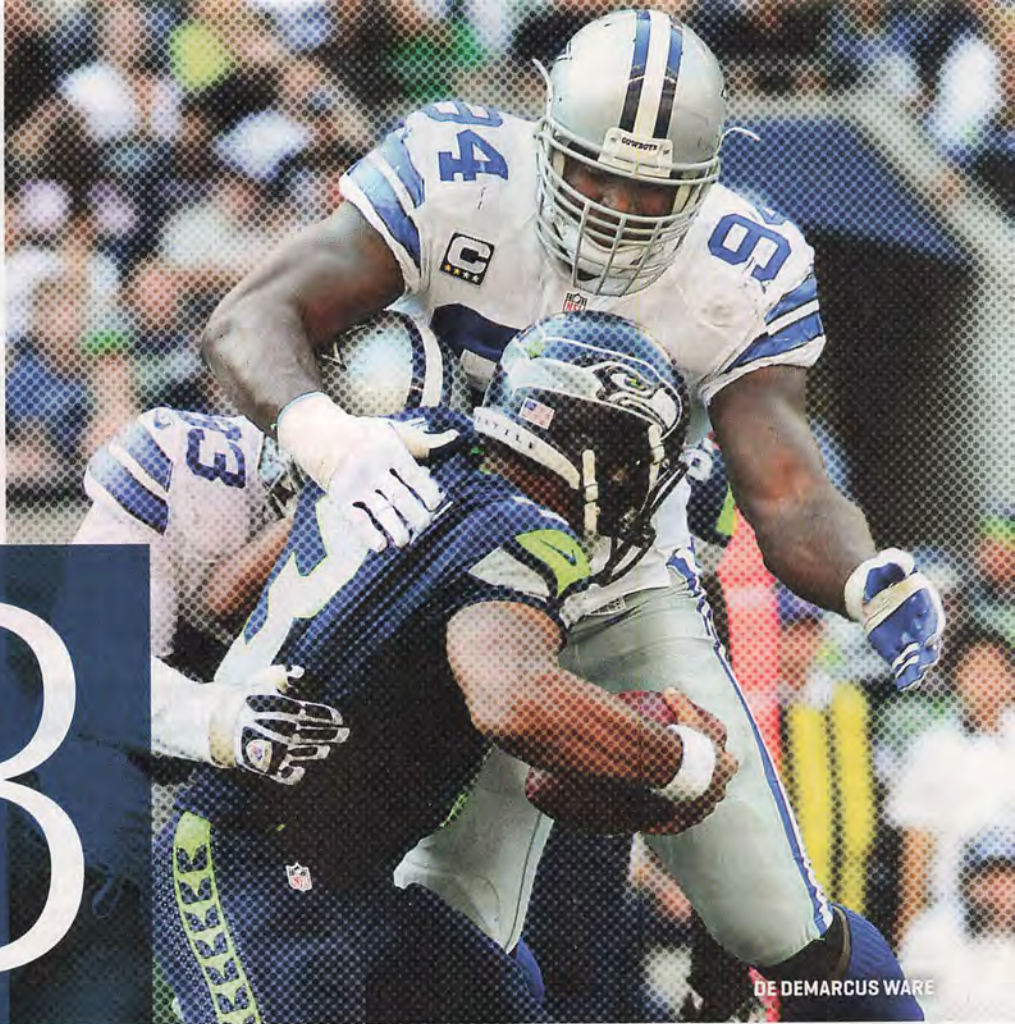
(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION



N

Dallas  
COWBOYS

13



DE DEMARCUS WARE

→ WITH A sad-sack 16 takeaways in 2012, the Cowboys were one of the least opportunistic teams in the NFL. (Only three had fewer.) In hiring Monte Kiffin to coordinate an underachieving defense, owner Jerry Jones *hoped* that a hail of turnovers would follow. And so it came to pass during Dallas's 12-7 exhibition loss to Arizona on Aug. 17—though not in the way that Jones had in mind. Cowboys fans watching that game saw seven turnovers. Alas, six of them were *by* Dallas. On the bright side, the defense, running Kiffin's 4-3 base, did not allow a TD off those six giveaways, four of which occurred on the Cowboys' side of the field.

While Kiffin's unit hasn't been particularly sticky-fingered in the preseason, the Boys got stingy when backed up to their own goal line; the starters didn't allow a red zone TD in four games. For a club that

In order to keep pace in the East, owner Jerry Jones ditched one defensive guru in exchange for another. But does 73-year-old Monte Kiffin have many tricks left?

BY  
AUSTIN  
MURPHY

gave up 25 points per game in 2012, that's a promising development.

Along with the usual questions—can Tony Romo earn the money Jones is paying him? Is this the year Dez Bryant (*page 58*) blows up?—there is this one: How much does the 73-year-old Kiffin have left in the tank? Plenty, would be the reply of anyone who saw the grinning septuagenarian bounding from drill to drill at the Cowboys' training camp in Oxnard, Calif. "Quick feet, quick feet—*now get ball!*" he blasted at linebackers during one afternoon practice. "Turn the corner. C'mon—*Speed, man! Tempo!*"

Kiffin clearly still loves this game. But has it passed him by? Can his Greatest-Hits-of-the-'90s Tampa Two system get it done in a conference that features RG3, a freakishly gifted pure sprinter running the read-option? How will his defensive staff fare against a coach, the Eagles' Chip Kelly, whose hurry-

up juggernaut hung 62 points on the last defense Kiffin coordinated?

In fairness, Kiffin has shown a willingness to evolve. While the Tampa Two tag has long denoted cornerbacks hovering cautiously in zone coverage, Kiffin has promised his corners, Brandon Carr and Morris Claiborne, both highly gifted man-to-man defenders, that they'll spend plenty of time "playing press-man, in your face."

Kiffin also blended coverages in his previous job. It didn't end well, in large part because of his defense's struggles against read-option attacks. Despite his cozy relationship with USC's coach—Lane Kiffin is his son—Monte had little recourse but to resign after the Trojans finished last season 60th in total defense, having surrendered 730 yards of offense in the aforementioned loss to Kelly's Ducks.

But the Cowboys had issues of their own, finishing 8-8 and failing



to make the postseason for the third straight year. So Jones fired coordinator Rob Ryan—he of perhaps too many schemes—in favor of Kiffin and his more straightforward, streamlined attack.

Under Kiffin, dueling sackmeisters Anthony Spencer and DeMarcus Ware must now devolve from stand-up outside linebackers into turf-pawing ends who will start most snaps in a three-point stance. It helps that each played end, one hand on the ground, in college. In a way the move uncomplicates their lives: They don't have to worry about running stride for stride with slot receivers, or rerouting wideouts on drag routes across the middle.

Ware describes his new duties thusly: "Hand on the ground. Play the run. Rush the passer. Very simple."

Ware has bulked up by roughly five pounds, to 258, in order to better cope with the tackles that he'll now be taking on directly. For his part, erstwhile 3-4 inside linebacker Sean Lee dropped 10 pounds for his move to the Mike (middle) 'backer spot in the 4-3. There he'll call defenses, stuff the run, cover tight ends and otherwise attempt to mirror what Brian Urlacher did in Chicago.

Lee often gets compared to the former Bears All-Pro, and he cringes a little every time. "He's one of the best of all time," says the fourth-year guy out of Penn State. "I've [started 21] games, and I'm coming off an injured season." Regardless, with down linemen eating more blocks for him in Kiffin's system, he will have a career season if he can stay on the field.

After that 12-7 loss to the Cardinals, Lee wasn't in the mood to accept congratulations for some stout play in the red zone, lamenting, "We have to find a way to get more turnovers." The system is new, the goal is not. Take it away, Boys. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>JAN. 11</b>	Hire D coordinator Monte Kiffin [USC]
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Franchise DE Anthony Spencer
<b>MARCH 29</b>	Re-sign QB Tony Romo
<b>APRIL 9</b>	Lose CB Mike Jenkins [OAK]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft C Travis Frederick [Wisconsin], TE Gavin Escobar [San Diego State]
<b>MAY 14</b>	Lose RB Felix Jones [PIT]
<b>AUG. 21</b>	Re-sign LB Sean Lee

**ANALYSIS** Kiffin replaces the bombastic Rex Ryan and brings a less reckless (and hopefully more effective) element to the D, but Jerry Jones uncharacteristically shied away from a big-ticket free-agent signing (as in last year's inking of CB Brandon Carr, which started out shakily) and focused on his QB. There, the owner-G.M.'s strong feelings toward Romo, combined with a bloated cap number, resulted in a particularly player-friendly contract: a remarkable \$55 million guarantee that surpassed deals of similar length for Joe Flacco and Aaron Rodgers. Beyond Romo and Spencer the Cowboys were quiet, appearing to gamble that some coaching tweaks will do the trick.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Defensive tackle Jason Hatcher

One of the subplots of the Cowboys' switch to Monte Kiffin's 4-3 could well be titled, How Low Can Jason Hatcher Go? Hatcher excelled as a defensive end in Dallas's 3-4 scheme last season, his first as a full-time starter, racking up 51 tackles, four sacks and 25 pressures. Now, with Kiffin's arrival, the eighth-year player has been bumped inside to tackle, where his height—he goes 6' 6", 299 pounds—is not an advantage. Lining up as a three-technique (shaded to the outside shoulder of the guard opposite him), he must stay as low as possible to get under the pads of the man trying to block him. Can the Cowboys' tallest defensive player stay low enough to make the transition? In camp, the answer was a resounding yes, with Hatcher whipping linemen, drawing frequent praise from coach Jason Garrett for his superlative "knee bend" and "position flex." Position flex? That's another way of saying Hatcher is versatile: He can play end, the three-technique, or nosetackle (between guard and center), which is where he's likely to move upon the return of Jay Ratliff, who missed most of the preseason. The Cowboys are high on Hatcher, who, it turns out, has no problem getting low. —A.M.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 8-8

**SEPT. 8** New York Giants **15** at Kansas City **22** St. Louis **29** at San Diego  
**OCT. 6** Denver **13** Washington **20** at Philadelphia **27** at Detroit  
**NOV. 3** Minnesota **10** at New Orleans **17** BYE **24** at New York Giants **28** Oakland [Thu]  
**DEC. 9** at Chicago [Mon] **15** Green Bay **22** at Washington **29** Philadelphia

**DANGER ZONE** The Cowboys have endured long winters of late (they're 4-6 after November the last two seasons), and there are plenty of reasons to believe this year will not be any better. Taking care of business at home will be a must.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 6

#### QB TONY ROMO

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
425	65.6	4,903	28-19	90.5

#### RB DEMARCO MURRAY

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
161	663	35	4

#### WR DEZ BRYANT

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
92	1,382	15.0	12

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 19

#### DT JAY RATLIFF

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	0	0

#### DE DEMARCUS WARE

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
56	11½	0

#### DE ANTHONY SPENCER

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
95	11	0



N

Arizona  
CARDINALS

14



QB CARSON PALMER

→ ONE DAY before practice in July, 6' 8", 300-pound defensive end Calais Campbell sat in front of his locker at University of Phoenix Stadium and attempted to explain, with diplomacy, how demoralizing last season had been. The defense gave up two or fewer touchdowns in 12 games, yet Arizona finished 5–11. It's no secret that the source of the team's problems was a lack of quarterback production. **The Cardinals started four different passers—John Skelton, Kevin Kolb, Ryan Lindley and Brian Hoyer—who combined over the final 12 games to throw 18 picks and only four TDs.** Campbell paused. Then he punted. "That's football," he said. "It's just the way it is."

But his teammates were having none of it. "Bulls---," one coughed into his hand. "Tell the truth!" shouted another.

**It's easy to sling mud—the passers didn't pass muster in 2012. Not even close. But Carson Palmer has the arm to make the new coach's big-play-minded playbook work**

BY  
JIM  
TROTTER

Fact is, the situation was *terribly* demoralizing. For the defenders. For the coaches, nearly all of whom were fired after the season. And for the receivers, who probably wouldn't have done much worse if they had been throwing the ball themselves.

**At the very least, the new quarterback comes with a pedigree.** The signing of Carson Palmer to a three-year, \$26 million free-agent deal with Arizona last April gives the team its best option at the position since Kurt Warner retired after the 2009 season. "We've got the guy to get us the ball now," says wideout Andre Roberts with a smile.

Palmer, 33, is the perfect fit for new coach Bruce Arians's aggressive passing game. He not only has the size (6' 5", 235 pounds), but he also has the arm strength and the intelligence to read defenses and create the "chunk" opportunities (completions that go for at

least 20 yards) that Arians, the former Colts offensive coordinator desires.

In each of his past four seasons as a play-caller, Arians's offenses—first with Pittsburgh and then with Indy—ranked 10th or higher in completions of 20 yards or longer. Three times they finished in the top three. He expects the trend to continue in 2013, given the pairing of Palmer with a receiving corps that includes Larry Fitzgerald, promising second-year pro Michael Floyd and the quietly effective Roberts, who has strong hands and runs precise routes.

The offensive line—a priority given Palmer's lack of mobility—is no longer the disaster it was last year, when it allowed a league-worst 58 sacks. Left tackle Levi Brown, who missed all of 2012 with a torn triceps, is back. And on the right side, 6' 7", 302-pound



free-agent tackle Eric Winston, who has started every game since the beginning of the '07 season (first with the Texans, then last year with the Chiefs), appears ready to take over.

Arians doesn't believe in allowing defenses to dictate game tempo or offensive opportunities. He repeatedly tells his quarterbacks and receivers that three can't cover two. **"To keep the game simple, we play a lot of three-on-two football,"** he says. **"If a team doubles one receiver, the other one has to win. If you're singled, you're the winner."**

"He wants at least six explosive plays a game, especially from [the receivers]," Roberts says.

Arians likes to push players out of their comfort zones. Instead of installing the offense piece by piece, he threw everything at Palmer at once. Instead of discussing concepts in detail, he gave him a few highlights and told him to figure out the rest on his own.

The coach is also requiring that his receivers learn each of the three wideout positions—a mandate that made Fitzgerald skeptical at first. He had, after all, experienced most of his success lining up at split end—on the open side of the formation, away from the heavy traffic. But Arians told Fitzgerald he was going to catch 100 passes in 2013 only if he worked the middle of the field as well. "I played all three spots in the past, but the difference is they would give me five to 10 plays that we wanted to run from the other spots," Fitzgerald says. "I didn't have to know *all* the plays for the other positions; I just knew what I had to do on a particular play."

If Arians has made life more difficult for Fitzgerald—whose four touchdowns last year were a career low—Palmer makes it easier. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>DEC. 31</b>	Fire coach Ken Whisenhunt, G.M. Rod Graves, O coordinator Mike Miller
<b>JAN. 8</b>	Promote Steve Keim to G.M.
<b>JAN. 17</b>	Hire coach Bruce Arians (IND)
<b>JAN. 18</b>	Lose O coordinator Ray Horton (CLE)
<b>JAN. 21</b>	Hire O coordinator Harold Goodwin (IND), D coordinator Todd Bowles (PHI)
<b>MARCH 8</b>	Cut SS Adrian Wilson
<b>MARCH 13</b>	Sign RB Rashard Mendenhall (PIT); cut FS Kerry Rhodes
<b>APRIL 2</b>	Trade for QB Carson Palmer (OAK)
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft OG Jonathan Cooper (North Carolina), FS Tyrann Mathieu (LSU)

**ANALYSIS** The Cardinals will rely heavily on a bunch of imports: a coach, a running back and, most important, a QB, Palmer, who two years ago cost Oakland first- and second-round picks but whom Arizona acquired for a sixth-rounder. Impressive—even more so if he becomes the first Cardinals passer since Kurt Warner to leverage Larry Fitzgerald's unique skills. On the opposite side of the ball, Mathieu benefits from the tutelage of close friend Patrick Peterson, the team's most versatile and important young player.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Free safety Tyrann Mathieu

As strong as this defense was for the majority of the 2012 season, that performance was overshadowed by the struggles of an offense that finished dead last in yards by a desert mile. Now the offense is improved, and the defense will continue to hum under new coordinator Todd Bowles, whose switch to a one-gap, 3-4 scheme means less reading and [hopefully] more penetrating by linemen. Previously, NT Dan Williams had to gauge which way an opponent's center was moving and react accordingly. "Now I just go," he says with a look that says, This is a good thing. Then there's the addition of the rookie Mathieu, a former LSU star who displays the football acumen and instincts of someone much older. He has the athleticism to play center field and the tenacity and agility to line up in the slot. And the nose for the ball that brought him college fame is still there. **"He's ahead of most rookies in terms of understanding concepts and schemes, what he has to do to be successful,"** says DE Calais Campbell. "He's a natural ball hawk who knows where to be at the right time." —J.T.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 5-11

**SEPT. 8** at St. Louis **15** Detroit **22** at New Orleans **29** at Tampa Bay  
**OCT. 6** Carolina **13** at San Francisco **17** Seattle (Thu) **27** Atlanta  
**NOV. 3** BYE **10** Houston **17** at Jacksonville **24** Indianapolis  
**DEC. 1** at Philadelphia **8** St. Louis **15** at Tennessee **22** at Seattle **29** San Francisco

**DANGER ZONE** Like the Saints, the Cardinals face as tough a trio of NFC opponents as possible, in succession. Unlike New Orleans, they'll then have to face one of the AFC's best. Thank goodness for the bye week.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 32

QB CARSON PALMER (N)					
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING	
345	61.1	4,018	22-14	85.3	

### RB RASHARD MENDENHALL (N)

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
51	182	9	1

### WR LARRY FITZGERALD

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
71	798	11.2	4

(N) NEW  
ACQUISITION

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 12

DT DARNELL DOCKETT		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
34	1½	0

### LB DARYL WASHINGTON

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
134	9	1

### CB PATRICK PETERSON

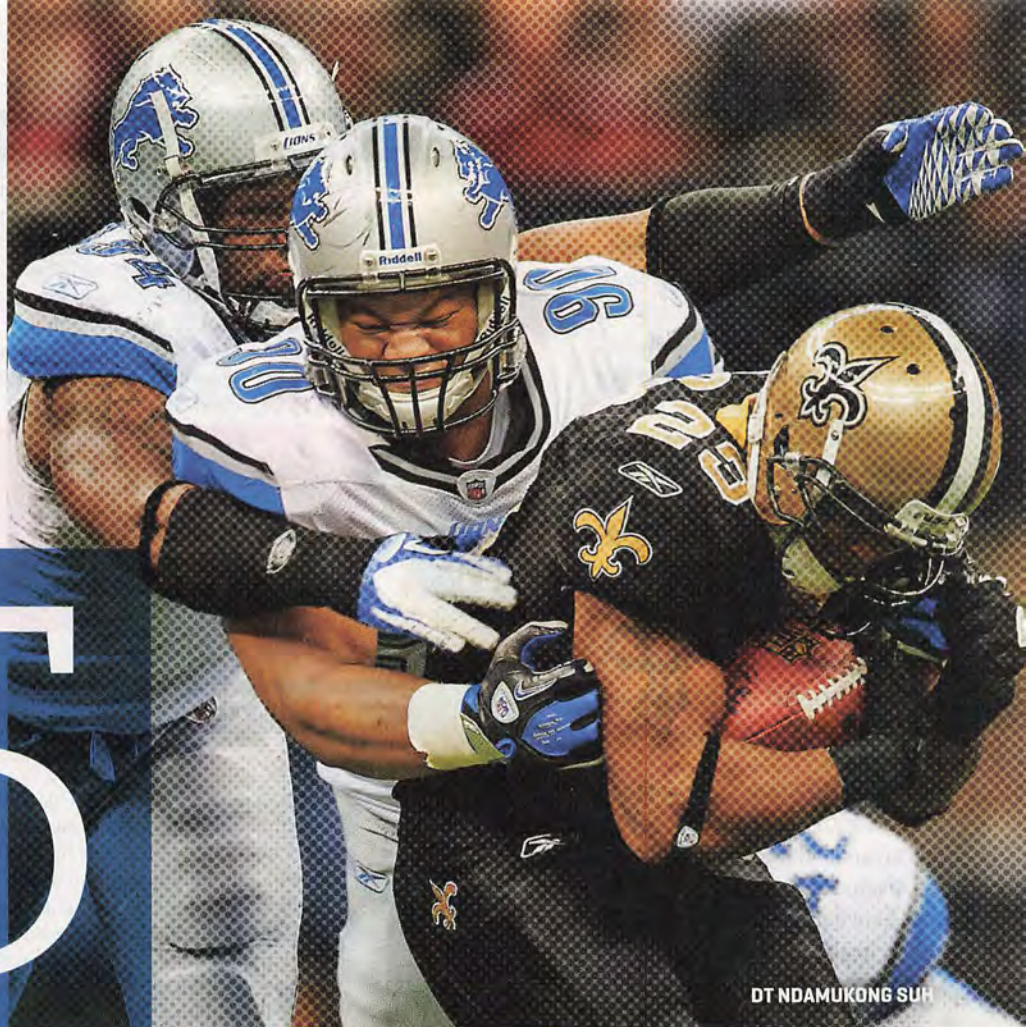
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
55	0	7



N

+  
Detroit  
**LIONS**

15



DT NDAMUKONG SUH

→ LIONS DEFENSIVE coordinator Gunther Cunningham had a busy off-season, welcoming several free agents and rookies who will be expected to leave an immediate imprint on a group that has steadily improved since he came to Detroit with coach Jim Schwartz in 2009. The Lions ranked last in yards allowed that year, 21st in '10, then 13th last season. "I came here and the cupboard was bare," says Cunningham. "Today, there isn't a player on defense that was here when we all got here."

The offense got the headline free-agent pickup in running back Reggie Bush, but the Lions spent three of their top four draft picks on defense, nabbing a likely starting corner (second-rounder Darius Slay) and replacements for departed ends Kyle Vanden Bosch and

*In terms of big uglies, they don't get any bigger and—well, nastier than Suh and Fairley. But it's time for that feral pair to start delivering unit-changing results*

BY  
**ROBERT KLEMKO**

Cliff Avril (Ziggy Ansah, the fifth pick overall, and Devin Taylor, a fourth-rounder). Detroit further fortified its line by signing ends Jason Jones and Israel Idonije. That pair will shore up a middling run defense, as will Glover Quin, a solid run-stopper and one of the top safeties in free agency.

The straws that stir this drink, however, are inarguably Ndamukong Suh and Nick Fairley, who were touted as the top interior defensive line pair entering the 2012 season before inconsistent play and injuries rendered them mortal. Only one defensive tackle had more combined hits, hurries and sacks last year than Suh's 54 (Cincinnati's Geno Atkins, who had 78), and no Detroit defensive lineman played more snaps, but Suh's ability to stop the run is still, at best, mediocre.

Fairley has improved in nearly

every area, but he was the most penalized defensive lineman last season (eight offside calls alone), and he played only half the snaps in the 13 games for which he was healthy. Criticized for his lack of conditioning, Fairley took steps to remedy that, cutting close to 15 pounds off his 2012 playing weight of 320. He says the difference has been tremendous, and teammates have noticed as well. Linebacker Stephen Tulloch says he's had trouble reading offensive line keys in practice because Suh and Fairley are blowing up their offensive teammates before plays even start to develop.

"We're going to give guys trouble, man," says Fairley. "It's like pick your poison this year with our defensive line. You cannot come in and double-team Ndamukong, and you can't come in and double-team me."

Suh's pass-rushing skills will





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be even more valuable with the team's current makeup. Ansah was a gamble, to say the least, having picked up football just three years ago and starting only nine games at BYU, where he had just 4½ sacks. Jones, a backup at defensive tackle last season in Seattle, has some technique to relearn at end, and some rust to brush off: He injured his right knee in December and has been limited in camp. Idonije, 32, will spell both Ansah and Jones, but the bulk of his experience at end came when he was a bookend to Julius Peppers in Chicago, and his recent spike in pass-rushing performance (26½ sacks in the last five seasons) was likely a result of the attention Peppers demanded on the other side of the line.

That leaves Suh and Fairley as the rare pair of interior linemen in the NFL asked to anchor a pass rush. In a division with Aaron Rodgers and Jay Cutler, that's a daunting task. Rodgers pulled off narrow wins over Detroit in Weeks 11 and 14 last season despite Fairley's collecting three sacks in those games. The former Super Bowl MVP has been successful against Suh-Fairley fronts (he is 3-0 versus Detroit since 2011), but he sees trouble ahead. "The two guys starting to give us real issues are Ndamukong Suh and Nick Fairley," Rodgers told SI in August. "Really good players. Bright futures."

Short of being the best in the league, Suh and Fairley just need to be good enough to take some pressure off an improved-but-still-a-ways-to-go secondary. They alone will be the difference between Cunningham and Schwartz keeping their positions past 2013. □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

B-



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>MARCH 12</b>	Lose OT Gosder Cherilus [IND]
<b>MARCH 13</b>	Sign RB Reggie Bush [MIA], SS Glover Quin [HOU]
<b>MARCH 14</b>	Lose DE Cliff Avril [SEA]; OT Jeff Backus [retirement]
<b>MARCH 17</b>	Sign DE Jason Jones [SEA]
<b>APRIL 10</b>	Sign K David Akers [SF]
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft DE Ezekiel Ansah [BYU], CB Darius Slay [Miss. St.]
<b>JUNE 25</b>	Sign DE Israel Idonije [CHI]
<b>JULY 10</b>	Re-sign QB Matthew Stafford

**ANALYSIS** The Lions' biggest investment was a curious one, lavishing \$41.5 million in guaranteed money on Stafford for three additional seasons when he had two years remaining on his contract. Now guaranteed \$94.5 million in gross earnings from Detroit, the QB needs improved production against good teams to deserve his wages. Bush is a clear upgrade at RB and should excel on Ford Field's quick turf. Akers becomes the first kicker in Detroit in 21 years not named Jason Hanson; no pressure, Ansah needs to transition brilliantly from freakish athlete to productive DE in order to justify letting Avril leave.

## THE CASE FOR...

### Wide receiver Ryan Broyles

Nine months into rehab for a torn left ACL, Broyles still needs more time before he's fully recovered. But when that happens—he's not quite at full speed—look out. The rookie's greatest accomplishment came in Week 12 last year: six catches for 126 yards against the Texans, suggesting the Lions had finally found a complement to the defense-stretching Calvin Johnson. When Broyles went down a week later with the second ACL tear of his career, his stat sheet read, 10 games, three starts, 22 catches. The former Oklahoma Sooner, who tops the NCAA's alltime list in receptions (349), tore his other ACL in 2011, his last year in college. And after hurrying back onto the field to prove his worth as an NFL rookie, he isn't rushing this recovery, playing sparingly during the preseason. As he works his way back into full-time status the 25-year-old is compensating for a diminished burst off the line with his route-running, know-how and with sure hands. When he's full speed he'll benefit from the addition of RB Reggie Bush, a pass-catching threat who should open up intermediate lanes for TE Brandon Pettigrew and, eventually, Broyles. —R.K.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 4-12

**SEPT. 8** Minnesota **15** at Arizona **22** at Washington **29** Chicago  
**OCT. 6** at Green Bay **13** at Cleveland **20** Cincinnati **27** Dallas  
**NOV. 3** BYE **10** at Chicago **17** at Pittsburgh **24** Tampa Bay **28** Green Bay [Thu]  
**DEC. 8** at Philadelphia **16** Baltimore [Mon] **22** New York Giants **29** at Minnesota

**SOFT SPOT** A short trip across Lake Erie to cushy Cleveland ends a cluster of road trips before Ford Field hosts its first back-to-back games of the season, offering the Lions a chance to steady themselves before their bye.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

### OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 3

#### QB MATTHEW STAFFORD

COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
435	59.8	4,967	20-17	79.8

#### RB REGGIE BUSH (N)

ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD
227	986	35	8

#### WR CALVIN JOHNSON

REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
122	1,964	16.1	5

### DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 13

#### DT NDAMUKONG SUH

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
35	8	0

#### CB CHRIS HOUSTON

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
56	0	2

#### SS GLOVER QUIN (N)

TACKLES	SACKS	INT
84	1	2

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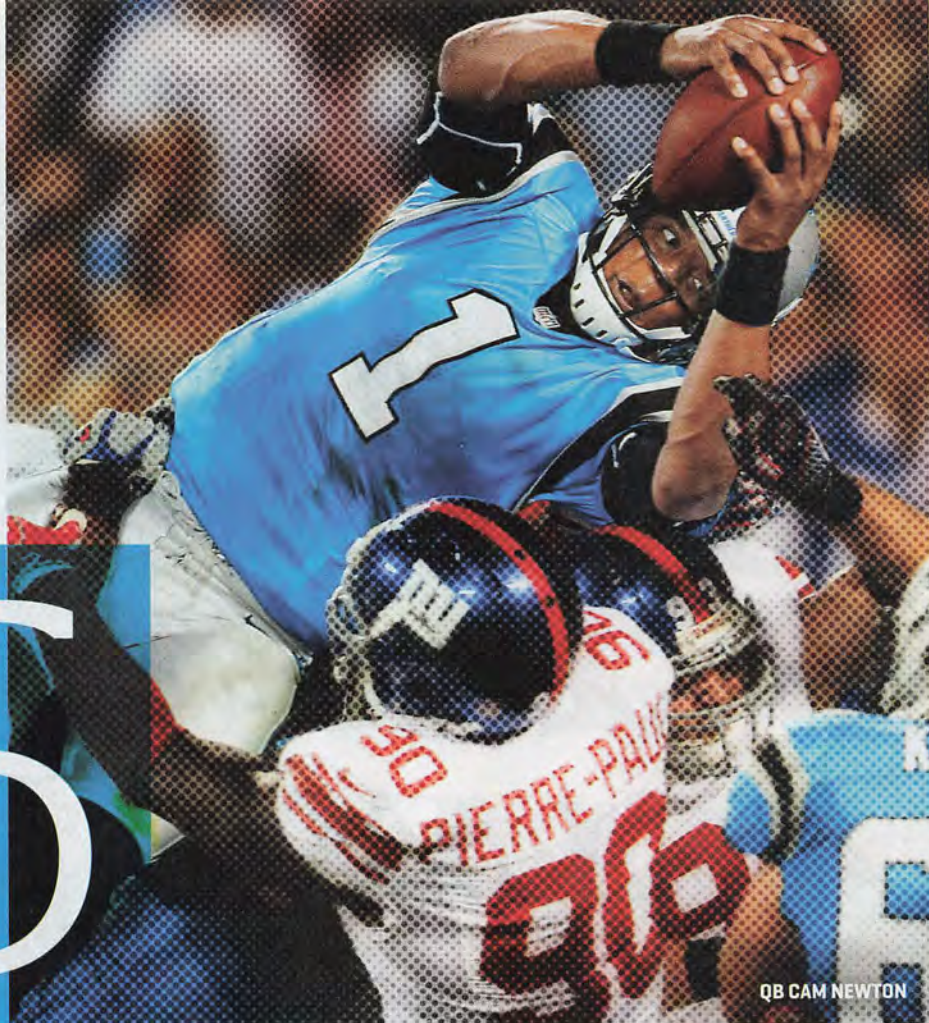
AUTHENTIC MOONSHINE



# N

## Carolina PANTHERS

# 16



QB CAM NEWTON

→ ONLY DESULTORY images linger from Cam Newton's 2012 season: the quarterback sitting under a towel, dejected on the bench, or going through a postgame press conference looking like he'd just been dumped. Meanwhile, the Panthers' season quickly slipped away with a 2-8 start.

By then the public had tuned out on Carolina. What it missed was a 5-1 mark to close the season as Newton began to grow into the role of franchise quarterback. Newton is supremely talented, without question. Nobody ever doubted that the claim is supported empirically: In terms of passing yards, his first two seasons stand as the best-ever debut by an NFL quarterback.

But a lot more goes into being the leader of a franchise than talent and statistics, and as Newton and the Panthers enter a critical

Cam Newton has the tools. Cam Newton has the numbers. Cam Newton just needs to get on the same page as his teammates in a make-or-break season

BY  
GREG  
BEDARD

third season together, Newton sounds like a player who gets it.

"I think it's just the whole maturation of my position," Newton said in the hallways of Bank of America Stadium after the Panthers' exhibition opener. "For me, one thing that I have to continuously learn is to trust my teammates. I have to give those guys more opportunities to make plays and also let them know what I'm thinking."

When first-year G.M. Dave Gettleman arrived from the Giants in January, the first thing he did was pore over the game film, scrutinizing the team from 1 to 53. He didn't believe the close to the 2012 season was a fluke, especially for Newton.

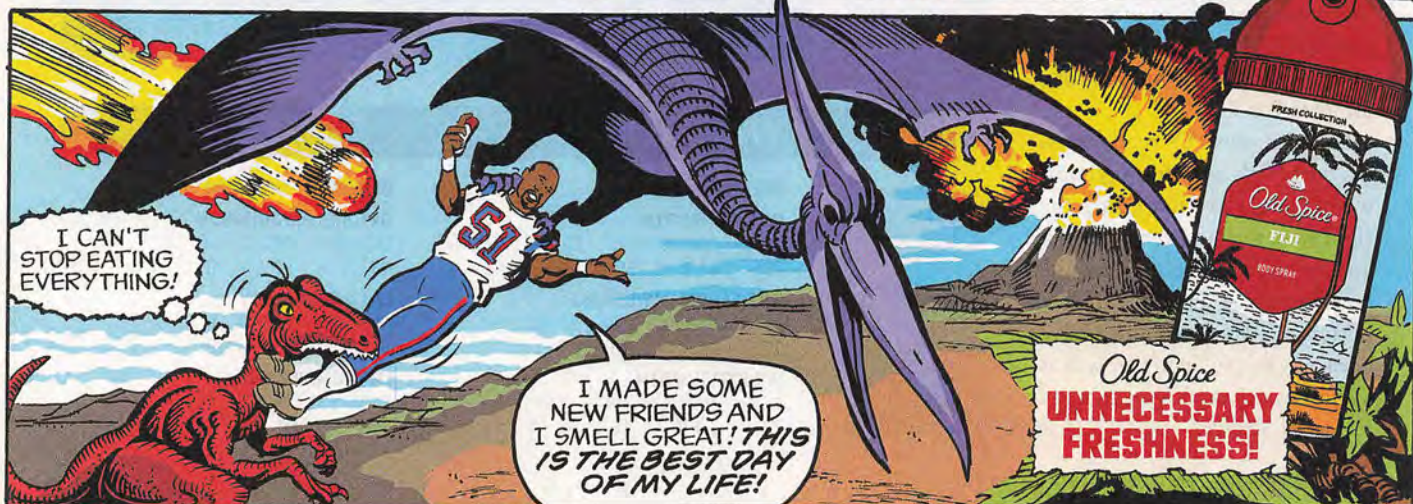
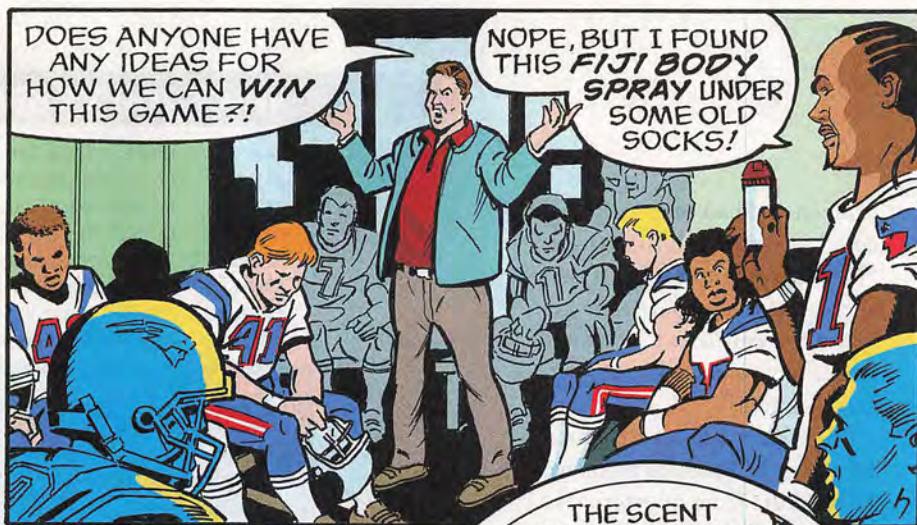
"I don't think it was coincidental at all," says Gettleman, who with the Giants had watched Eli Manning take his share of criticism and then emerge a two-time Super Bowl winner. "They went

to a more conventional running game. When they got back to doing what they do best—run downhill, play action—it gives [Newton] time. He's growing up. He made a large leap forward."

Newton's strong play actually stretched over the final seven games, including the loss to the Buccaneers last Nov. 18 that dropped Carolina to 2-8. And the improvement had everything to do with his taking care of the ball. Newton's completion percentage and yards per attempt were nearly identical in the first nine games and the final seven. But instead of eight touchdown passes and 13 turnovers (10 interceptions), he had 11 touchdown passes and two turnovers as the Panthers knocked off the Falcons and the Saints, among others.

"He's continued upon that path of growth that all young quarterbacks take, especially ones that







came in and had such early success," says tight end Greg Olsen. "He's learning to build off that success as the team tries to get better as a unit, tries to win more games to go along with that personal success."

To keep that offensive continuity going, the Panthers promoted Mike Shula from quarterbacks coach to offensive coordinator, filling the void left by Rob Chudzinski when he became coach of the Browns.

Coach Ron Rivera told *The Charlotte Observer* in July that he thinks Newton has taken more of an interest in his teammates. The guys he lines up with say he's done that all along, and they don't have any issues with Newton. "The thing I really admire about him is that he's been able to handle a lot of the criticism well," says center Ryan Kalil. "Being our leader, he's the first one to come to you and say, 'I've got to fix this, I have to do a better job.' I've played with guys who say, 'This is who I am, take it or leave it, and if you don't like it, get the hell out.' He's definitely not that guy."

Under Rivera and Newton the Panthers are 13-19. Twelve of those losses have been by seven or fewer points. Perhaps that suggests promise, but there's no getting around the franchise's four-year playoff drought. Says Gettleman, "Ron knows—we all know—we have to win. It's time for us to win."

Newton says he's ready to do his part. "It's easy for anybody, when things are not going the right way, to shut everybody out and go about it their own way," he says. "But I just have to do a better job. My teammates have been very helpful in my growth as a quarterback on this team, and I feel like it shows." □

Andrew  
Brandt's  
Off-season  
Grade

C+



## SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE

<b>JAN. 9</b>	Hire G.M. Dave Gettleman (NYG)
<b>JAN. 10</b>	Lose O coordinator Rob Chudzinski (CLE)
<b>JAN. 18</b>	Promote Mike Shula to O coordinator
<b>MARCH 8</b>	Cut CB Chris Gamble
<b>MARCH 12</b>	Cut LB James Anderson
<b>APRIL 2</b>	Sign LB Chase Blackburn (NYG)
<b>APRIL 10</b>	Sign WR Domenik Hixon (NYG)
<b>APRIL 25</b>	Draft DT Star Lotulelei (Utah), RB Kenjon Barner (Oregon)

**ANALYSIS** Gettleman brings a background honed in college scouting and will build accordingly. As expected in his first off-season, he avoided the profligate spending the Panthers exhibited in recent years. Free-agent signings were modest at best, with nominal bonus levels for former Giants Blackburn (\$200,000) and Hixon (\$250,000). The new G.M. further established his presence by applying public pressure on coach Ron Rivera ("We've given him tools") and Cam Newton ("Now it's time to win"), who is essentially in a contract year—he can renegotiate following this season.

## THE CASE FOR...

### The defense

Despite several key injuries (LB Jon Beason missed the season due to various ailments, CB Chris Gamble because of a shoulder issue), the Panthers finished 2012 with the NFL's No. 10 defense in yards allowed. Here's a bigger surprise: They could be better in '13. Ends Greg Hardy and Charles Johnson combined for 23½ sacks and nine forced fumbles last season, and now they have help in the middle from Carolina's top two draft picks, Utah's Star Lotulelei (who's been a standout in camp) and Purdue's Kawann Short. They'll also benefit from the year's experience gained by '12 free-agent addition Dwan Edwards (left), a former 3-4 end who blew up as a DT in the Panthers' 4-3 scheme. [His six sacks last season were more than his 5½ combined in seven previous seasons.] The linebacker corps is solid. In the end, the fate of this unit could rest on the patchwork secondary, which had to be filled prudently after the team ended up \$16 million over the salary cap. Newbies such as journeyman CB Drayton Florence, former Bears CB D.J. Moore and SS Mike Mitchell, a reserve in Oakland, will have to demonstrate improvement. Of course, that's easier with a front seven like Carolina's. —G.B.

## THE SCHEDULE

2012 RECORD: 7-9

<b>SEPT. 8</b>	Seattle <b>15</b>	at Buffalo <b>22</b>	New York Giants <b>29</b>	BYE
<b>OCT. 6</b>	at Arizona <b>13</b>	at Minnesota <b>20</b>	St. Louis <b>24</b>	at Tampa Bay (Thu)
<b>NOV. 3</b>	Atlanta <b>10</b>	at San Francisco <b>18</b>	New England [Mon] <b>24</b>	at Miami
<b>DEC. 1</b>	Tampa Bay <b>8</b>	at New Orleans <b>15</b>	New York Jets <b>22</b>	New Orleans <b>29</b> at Atlanta

**DANGER ZONE** The Pats are anything but pushovers on Monday nights: They're 10-1 in that prime spot since 2006. It seems almost unfair to face them immediately after playing each of the teams in last year's NFC title game.

## THE CORE

WITH 2012 STATS

OFFENSE 2012 RANK: 12				
QB CAM NEWTON				
COMP	PCT	YARDS	TD-INT	RATING
280	57.7	3,869	19-12	86.2
RB DEANGELO WILLIAMS				
ATT	YARDS	REC	TTD	
173	737	13	7	
WR STEVE SMITH				
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
73	1,174	16.1	4	

DEFENSE 2012 RANK: 10		
DE CHARLES JOHNSON		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
43	12½	0
LB LUKE KUECHLY		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
165	1	2
LB THOMAS DAVIS		
TACKLES	SACKS	INT
103	0	1



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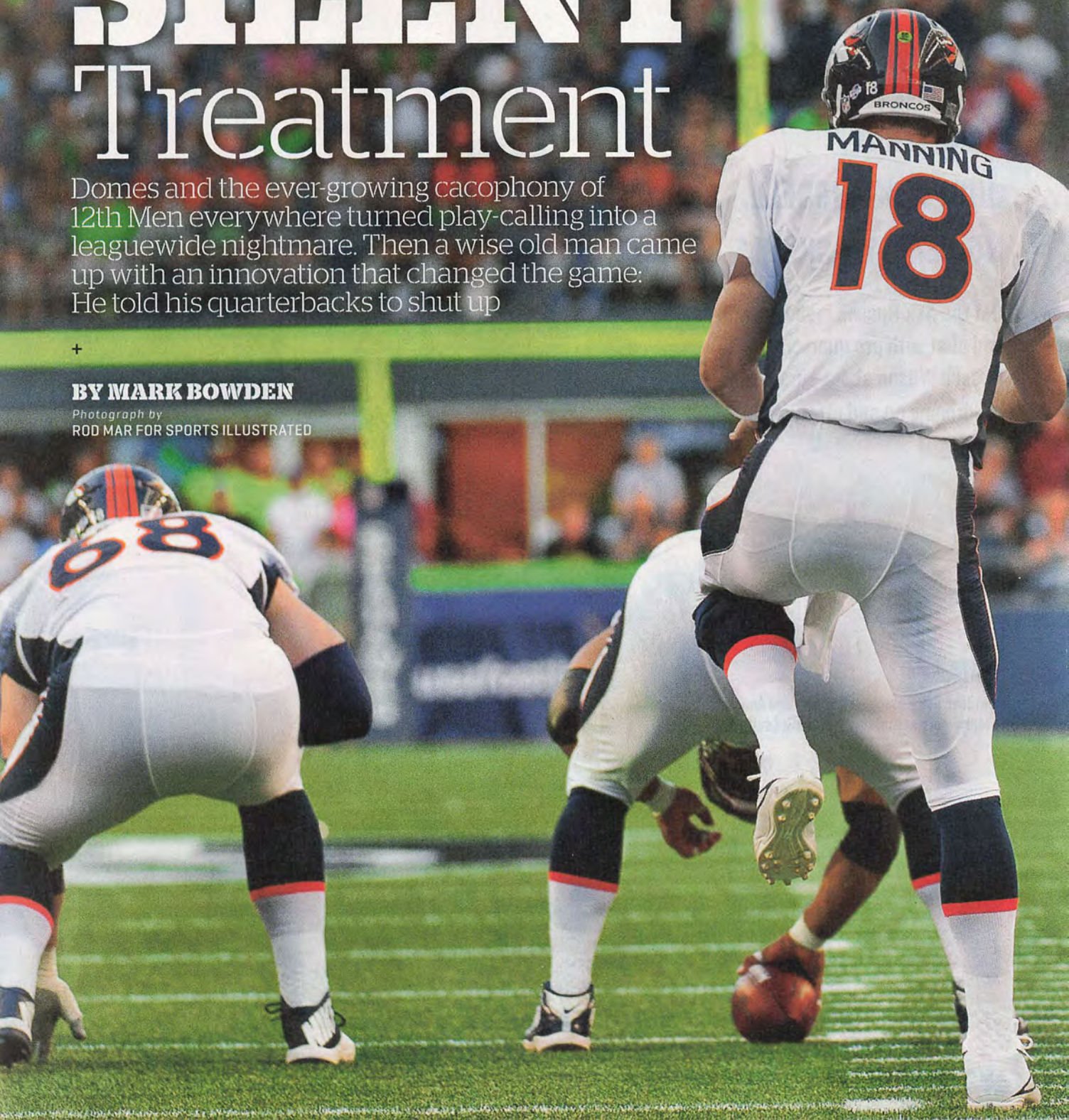
# THE SILENT Treatment

Domes and the ever-growing cacophony of 12th Men everywhere turned play-calling into a leaguewide nightmare. Then a wise old man came up with an innovation that changed the game: He told his quarterbacks to shut up

+

**BY MARK BOWDEN**

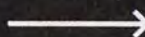
Photograph by  
ROD MAR FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





## TAP DANCE

From early in his pro career, Manning has been the foremost practitioner of the silent snap count, carrying his wisdom to Denver from his pioneering Indy days.



YOU MIGHT not expect a long-retired, much-dinged, memory-impaired NFL quarterback to recall the details of a single play from 27 years ago, but when I began describing the one that interested me to former Browns play-caller Bernie Kosar, he

interrupted me. "Unfortunately, I can finish this story, but go ahead," he said. "I'll be nice and pretend like I don't know. I could claim, 'Hey, I've had concussions; I don't know what you're talking about.' But . . . go ahead."

Kosar is a boisterously cheerful man who has had a rocky time in retirement. He has weathered a widely publicized bankruptcy and struggled with memory loss, a consequence of the many concussions he suffered in more than 130 pro games. He starred in easily a half a hundred more as a Pennsylvania high schooler and then as quarterback of the Miami Hurricanes. That means he took thousands of snaps. Some went well; some went badly. Most were unmemorable. The one I was asking about was a cock-up.

It came in the final, futile series of the Browns' 1986 division playoff loss to the Dolphins. It happened in the Orange Bowl, where Kosar had led the Hurricanes to a national championship two Januarys before. The Browns were a big surprise that season. Under Kosar, then a rookie, they squeaked into the playoffs and on this day stunned the heavily favored Dolphins by jumping out to a 21-3 lead. Miami's defense stiffened, however, and its offense scored three unanswered second-half touchdowns. With less than two minutes to play, the Dolphins led by three points.

Kosar had one last chance. Seventy-five thousand Miami fans, whipped to a frenzy by the Dolphins' second-half heroics, were doing their best to flatten the Browns' offense with sound, and they seemed to be succeeding. Then, when every down and every second mattered, the Browns squandered a play. It wasn't a game loser; it wasn't even the critical play in the drive. But it hurt. Inside that cauldron of noise, Cleveland's deafened offense was trying something new, a silent snap count, the brainstorm of the Browns' offensive line coach, Howard Mudd. Kosar didn't have much choice. He could not make himself heard even when he lined up over the center and barked the snap count at the top of his voice. So he was back in the shotgun formation, 10 feet behind the center, orchestrating the play with his feet. He lifted his right foot to signal wide receiver Glen Young to go in motion, but as Young trotted across the backfield, center Mike Baab prematurely snapped the ball. Maybe Kosar had gotten his footwork wrong, or maybe Baab, peering back through his legs at the world upside down, with a hulking,



ferocious defender poised to run him over, had misread his cue. The ball hit Kosar and fell to the turf. The Browns came up with it, but they had lost a big chunk of precious time, several yards and one critical down. Cleveland managed several more plays, even made a big first down, but the clock ran out before the team could get in position for a field goal.

"I still remember it like it was yesterday," says Kosar. "I was sick over it. I'm still sick over it."

Baab and Kosar still don't agree over who was at fault, and all these years later they still jocularly point fingers at each other, but both know that the overriding reason, one that no self-respecting NFL player would dare float as an excuse, was *noise*. The old 12th Man.

**T**HE FIRST use of the term *12th Man* in football came in 1912, in an alumni publication of the University of Iowa, and referred to the intangible contribution of fans to the school's team. Texas A&M has formally trademarked the term. But in the NFL, around the time of Kosar's disaster in Miami, crowd noise had become something more than emotional support. It had started messing with outcomes.

Howard Mudd played guard for the 49ers and the Bears from 1964 through '70, when the league was really taking off, and he doesn't remember ever having any trouble with noise. But during the '70s the volume grew and grew and grew, in step with the league's skyrocketing popularity. By '85 the sound level in stadiums routinely topped 100 decibels, about what you hear sitting astride a revving Harley-Davidson or operating a table saw. In other words offensive linemen, who must brace to meet the mad charge of locomotive pass rushers, could no longer hear the quarterback calling for the snap of the ball.

While this might seem a small thing to someone who has never experienced it, it was a nightmare for blockers. Why not, you might ask (and coaches implored), just *watch* the football? When *it* moves, *you* move! Isn't that what defenders have to do? But this advice was of little help to offensive tackles. Pigeons may be able to see separate things out of each eye, but human beings cannot. An offensive tackle, at the far end of the interior line, cannot watch both the ball and the pass rusher who is preparing to flatten him. When he can't hear, he has to watch the ball, which means he has to turn his head, which means he's doomed.

Jeff Saturday, the Colts' two-time All-Pro center, says that crowd noise was an occasional problem for him in certain stadiums during his college career at North Carolina, but it became a constant problem when he turned pro in 1999. "In the pros the game is so much more advanced, with all the calls and checks and changes at the line of scrimmage, that verbal communication is at a premium," Saturday says. "If

linemen can't hear, they don't have a fighting chance."

"When we would go to Seattle, in that dome, it was a tremendous problem," says John Alt, an offensive tackle for the Chiefs from 1984 through '96. "It took away a lot of your offense. You couldn't audible the way you normally would. And for those of us playing tackle, well, you've got a defensive end running forward [at a ridiculous speed] while you're trying to block him a half-second late running backward. The line coach would be yelling, 'Watch the ball! Watch the ball!' But you just couldn't do it."

Alt was not alone. Tackles failed a lot in their mission starting in the mid-1980s, which meant quarterbacks were getting creamed in the backfield with regularity. Kosar jokes about it, but his memory loss bears witness. Over two decades, from 1980 to 2000, it was open season on NFL quarterbacks; the average number of sacks per team spiked as high as 46.9 in the mid-'80s. Everyone knew where the

## In 1985, the sound level 100 decibels. Offensive the quarterback

point of weakness was. Stranded in the din at either end of the interior line, tackles struggled to do the impossible. Those years produced seven of the league's top 10 alltime sack leaders: Bruce Smith (1985–2003), Reggie White ('85–'00), Kevin Greene ('85–'99), Chris Doleman ('85–'99), Richard Dent ('83–'97), Lawrence Taylor ('81–'93) and Leslie O'Neal ('86–'99). The three others in the top 10—Michael Strahan ('93–'07), John Randle ('90–'03) and Jason Taylor ('97–'11)—overlapped that period. The most likely reason for the great blossoming of pass-rushing skills in the last two decades of the 20th century was crowd noise.

Players, coaches and NFL officials tried all sorts of remedies—to no avail. Rules permitted only the quarterback to communicate by radio with the sideline, but the league tried outfitting offensive guards with speakers in their shoulder pads to broadcast the snap count to the tackles. Didn't work. They tried fitting tackles with hearing aids designed to filter out background noise. Didn't work. They tried having the center bark out the count. Didn't work. They tried amplifying the snap count with speakers at the 30-yard lines on both sides of the field. Didn't work. They tried having the linemen hold hands. Didn't work.

Players experimented with their own approaches. I was covering a game in Buffalo's Rich Stadium in 1990 between the Bills and the Eagles. In a scene recounted in my 1994 book, *Bringing the Heat*, the Eagles' giant right tackle, Ron Heller, a brick wall on most occasions, was getting scorched by Bills defensive end

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Shanahan shares  
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read-option with  
Peter King.





in stadiums routinely topped  
linemen could no longer hear  
calling for the snap of the ball.

Bruce Smith, and midway through the game Philadelphia coach Buddy Ryan benched him. The exasperated Heller confronted his quarterback, Randall Cunningham, on the sideline. "Look, Randall, I can't hear you out there," he said.

To Heller's amazement, Cunningham explained that despite the din, he was deliberately not raising his voice on the snap count. Someone had told him that was the way to capture another person's attention. "I'm using my soft voice," he said. The infuriated tackle had a few choice words for that theory, delivered loudly enough to be heard over the din. In short: *Didn't work.*

Then, around 1998–99, something made the problem go away. That something was the silent snap count. Its first master practitioners were Peyton Manning, Jeff Saturday and the Colts. Its architect? The man who had experimented with it during that ill-fated Browns game in '86, the man Manning calls "a philosopher of football, an honest-to-God guru": Howard Mudd.

**H**E COACHED for eight NFL teams over five decades after he stopped playing. When he retired in 2009 from the Colts, with whom he had his greatest success, Mudd was feted as an NFL great. Manning pulled out all the stops. He had a commemorative video made, gathering old footage from NFL Films and testimonials from Mudd's former playing and coaching colleagues and setting it all to some of Mudd's favorite Simon and Garfunkel music.

**LOUD AND PROUD**  
Even in the open air of CenturyLink Field, Seattle fans (right) can wreak the kind of vocal havoc that undid Kosar [19] in Miami in '86.



Manning mounted and framed three jerseys signed by some of the game's greatest names. It was all presented to the coach at a private dinner attended only by Manning and the Colts' offensive line. "It was like attending his own funeral!" Manning says. A few weeks later Mudd came out of retirement to coach for the Eagles.

Manning called him. "I want all that stuff back!" he said. "Hell, Howard, when you retire you're supposed to *stay* retired!"

Mudd coached for two seasons in Philadelphia. He recently retired for the second time—"for good," he tells me. To see him today, at 71, with hips and knees so battered that he walks hunched over a cane, you would never guess that in his prime he was a giant. He was 6' 2", weighed more than 250 pounds and made three trips to the Pro Bowl. He is a member of the NFL's All-Decade Team of the 1960s. But as the body fades, it reveals *mind*; Mudd aged from Yeti to Yoda.

"Coach Howard is a true student of the game," says Saturday, who worked with Mudd during most of the center's 13 years in Indianapolis, "and he is one of those guys who has played at a high level, so he respects the athleticism on both sides of the ball. For example, if you were beat on a play not because you did something wrong but because the guy opposite you just beat you, Coach Howard rarely had an issue with that. He knew how good the guy on defense was. But he also believed the mental aspect of the game wasn't just some abstraction. He preached that the better prepared and focused you were, the more you could 'slow the game down,' as he put it. I found that to be true."



WHEN THE Eagles coaxed Mudd back, they gave him an electric cart so he could maneuver around their practice fields. He looked hobbled, but he was still as tough as jerky. His wide, round face was rimmed with a full white beard, and his thick brow could still clench his whole face into a fist, but the look was deceptive. Mudd is less tough than clever. He has a hair-trigger sense of humor and a quick and playful mind. He is also startlingly blunt and utterly without pretense. He is at work on an instruction book for blockers with the terrific working title, *S--- That I Know Works*. Kosar recalls, "Coach Howard wasn't just stubborn and physical like many football coaches are, banging their heads against the wall all the time. He tried to be creative. And this silent count, it was one of the things he really believed in."

As Mudd remembers it, the league brought the noise problem on itself. He noticed it while coaching for the Seahawks in the late 1970s and early '80s. The team played in the Kingdome, which, because of its concrete structure, seemed to retain sound even more than other roofed stadiums. When the home fans' deafening cheers sowed confusion in enemy offenses, the team did things to encourage the crowd: It broadcast chants over the loudspeakers and promoted the antics of a beer-vending unofficial cheerleader, Bill Scott, who became famous as Bill the Beerman. Opposing teams began preparing for the Kingdome by blasting noise from loudspeakers on the sidelines during practice.

Soon teams throughout the league were imitating the Seahawks. Bill the Beerman went pro. He toured other stadiums, teaching new crowds the finer points of pumping up the volume. And fans loved it. When they forced the visiting team to waste timeouts and botch offensive plays, they realized the fantasy of every fan who has ever donned a team jersey. They were *in the game*. They were the 12th Man! The league loved it too. It was fun, and it created a nice incentive to buy tickets and actually attend the games, which were increasingly available on TV.

Offensive coaches hated the noise. In 1981, in what can only be described as an act of deep hypocrisy, Seahawks coach Jack Patera did something about it. Seattle was scheduled to play Green Bay at Lambeau Field, where the Packers had enthusiastically embraced crowd noise as a weapon. Mudd was Patera's offensive line coach and at that point had no answer to the noise problem. So Patera dusted off his NFL rule book and found a 1956 stricture that no one ever recalled using. It said the referee had the power to stop the game if the quarterback could not make himself heard over the crowd. "Well, piss on it," Patera told his young quarterback, Jim Zorn. "What we are going to do is, I do not want you to snap the ball if you can't hear."

On game day the crowd was predictably deafening, so



Zorn did as instructed. "I stood there while the 25-second [play] clock was ticking," he recalls. "If the crowd was loud, what I had to do was turn around and look at the referee. And the referee would judge whether or not it was loud enough. I turned around, and the ref stopped the game. He came and stood over the ball and tried to quiet the crowd down."

This had a predictable effect. "The crowd got louder," says Zorn. The ref waited for the fans to tire out and then signaled for play to resume, but every time Zorn approached the center, the noise kicked up once more. This happened over and over, until the delay stretched to 27 minutes. A scandal. It messed with the most sacrosanct feature of Sunday-afternoon football: the network programming schedule. In short order the ref was feeling a lot of heat. He turned it on Zorn.

"Eventually Mr. Official, he's saying, 'Hey, you've got to help me out here,'" the quarterback says. "And the players want to play, you know what I mean?" Zorn found himself very much alone at the center of the field. "I guess if I had been a little bolder or more devious," he says, "I might have said, 'Let's try and take this thing to the max.'" He folded.

"I just tried to be as loud as I could be," Zorn continues. "And I've got a pretty big voice. But with some of these crowds, the linemen just couldn't hear."

Clearly, the crowds were not going to back down. When Mudd left Seattle to help coach the Browns in 1983, he noticed that Cleveland Municipal Stadium had a large decibel meter on its scoreboard, which only encouraged the crowd to yell louder. By '89 the noise problem was so out of hand—quarterbacks kept getting injured, and offenses had had enough—that the league at last stepped in. NFL Rule 4, Section 3, Article 7, Paragraph 13 ("Obvious inability of the offense to hear team signals due to crowd noise") was amended, installing a nine-step procedure so





**JUST DIN, BABY**  
With the guidance of Mudd (near left) in Indianapolis, Manning (18) was in perfect sync with Saturday (63) and especially Glenn (78), whose career (quietly) took off.

complex that it would have done U.N. arms negotiators proud. The new instructions said, in essence, that the ref could stop the game if the stadium was too loud, and after a series of warnings he could penalize the home team one of its timeouts. When all the timeouts were gone, he could assess five-yard penalties until the crowd backed off.

And it worked—except it didn't. Bengals coach Sam Wyche thought the rule was absurd, and he had his quarterback, Boomer Esiason, put it to the test in an exhibition game that year in the New Orleans Superdome. The crowd noise wasn't even that bad, but at Wyche's direction, Esiason complained, the ref stopped play, and when the warning went out over the public address system, according to SPORTS ILLUSTRATED pro football guru Paul Zimmerman, "the decibel level [went] up by about 200 percent." So the ref threw the flag and subtracted a Saints timeout. The crowd roared all the louder. When New Orleans's timeouts were gone, the ref assessed a five-yard penalty, and finally the disgruntled crowd obeyed. Play resumed.

It proved to be a Pyrrhic victory. Football fans around the country erupted in protest. "Next day everyone who ever wrote a high school editorial was at his typewriter," Zimmerman wrote, "firing away about the high-handed NFL dictating to the fans who spent their hard-earned money on a ticket about when they could or could not make noise. There were cries of fascism from the left wing press." The league backed down.

"The rule was too complicated," says Joel Bussert, the NFL's vice president of player personnel and football operations. But that wasn't really it. The rule was universally unpopular. "We saw in that exhibition game that the crowd didn't care if the Saints kept their timeouts or not," says Bussert. "They lost all three timeouts! It was good sport. Everyone was having a good time. So the rule just disappeared by acclamation at the league meeting." *Didn't work.*

So linemen continued to flounder, and defensive ends continued to chalk up Hall of Fame sack totals. Various teams began experimenting with a silent count in the shotgun formation, but it was very limiting. Quarterbacks didn't like using it; they couldn't change the play once the team broke its huddle, and there was confusion when they signaled for receivers or running backs to go into motion. Mudd, who left Cleveland to coach in Kansas City and then went back for a second stretch with Seattle before joining the Colts in 1998, was convinced that the silent count could work. He was haunted by a conversation he'd had with a fellow Seattle coach, the late Andy MacDonald, who said he had spent some time early in his career coaching at a school for the deaf in Michigan.

"Wait," Mudd said, "they had a *football team*?"

Assured that they did, Mudd asked, "How do they coordinate the offensive line for the snap?" If a deaf team could launch a play in silence, why couldn't an NFL team?

After years of trial and error, of ill-conceived high-tech solutions and rules changes, here was the elegant answer: timing. Instead of having the quarterback call out the count, he handed the responsibility to the center. He simply tapped the center on the butt when he was ready to receive the ball. The center then lifted his head to look squarely at the defensive player in front of him, signaling to the line that the silent snap count had started. He and the linemen would then count to themselves, "One-one-thousand," and the center would snap the ball.

It was so simple, it was beautiful. As soon as the center lifted his head, the other linemen could turn their heads toward the defenders, count one-one-thousand and go. To mix things up, the rhythm of the silent count was varied. In the huddle, the center was instructed to snap either one count after the signal or two. Football being the ultimate macho sport, the code became *c-k* for one and *balls* for two.

Mudd had been around the NFL long enough to know



that a new idea, even a great one, would be a hard sell. Football is a conservative sport. "It was like suggesting a different route home to someone who has been commuting the same way for years," Mudd says. "They'll say, 'I don't want to go that way.'"

At first Mudd's teams practiced the silent snap count reluctantly and used it sparingly, so the timing of the offensive linemen was off as much as it was on. But by the time Mudd started working with Colts linemen in 1998, charged with protecting Manning, the league's No. 1 draft pick, he believed the silent count was more than just expedient. It was actually a better way to snap the ball.

What convinced him was left tackle Tarik Glenn.

**A** COACH WITH a great idea is nothing without a great player. Glenn was the genius Mudd had been waiting for. "He was the best," Mudd says. "The best ever."

A first-round draft pick in 1997, Glenn spent his first year discovering that blocking NFL defensive ends was hard under ordinary circumstances, but when he couldn't hear, it was nearly impossible. Manning arrived the following year and was understandably frustrated when defensive ends kept hitting him like freight trains from his blind side. Mudd remembers hearing the quarterback chew out Glenn on the sideline during one game and stepping up to defend his tackle. "Tarik can't hear you," Mudd told Manning.

"Well, he should be able to hear," Manning complained. "It's not that loud."

"That's bull---," Mudd said.

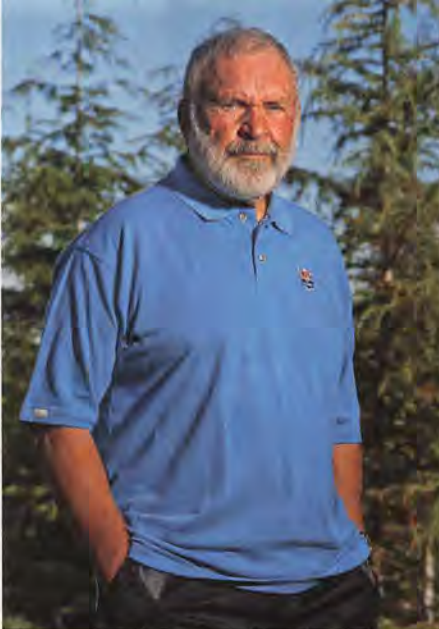
"Well, [tackle Adam] Meadows can hear!"

"You are not in charge of deciding what Tarik can hear and what he can't hear!" Mudd told him.

Mudd prevailed on his skeptical coach, Jim Mora, to let him drill the players on the silent count at every practice. If deaf kids could do it, Mudd told the players, pros could too. And he was right. In time Manning became a fervent convert.

"I was wrong, and Howard was right," Manning says. "It was my responsibility to make sure all the linemen could hear me, and it was especially difficult for us because we were using a no-huddle offense most of the time. The silent count solved a lot of problems for us."

The Colts got good at it. Glenn got very good at it. He learned to coordinate the count with the swivel of his head. It was like a dance move. "It made a huge difference," he says. "It gave me time to face the task at hand. It's all about timing, and pretty quick I could just *feel* it." In fact Glenn started getting off the snap so fast that refs flagged him, claiming he had jumped too early. Mudd defended him.



#### MUDD AND GUTS

The father of the silent snap count, now 71, was a steamrolling three-time All-Pro giant for the Niners in the '60s.

"He would send a man to the league office and have them review it," says Glenn. "After a while they started to see that I wasn't offside. Coach Howard didn't just come up with the silent count, he *sold* it, to the team and then to the league."

Soon Manning and Saturday were using the silent count for every snap on the road, and they even used it in their own domed stadium when things got too loud. Manning by then was famous for gesticulating and shouting instructions from the backfield before the snap of the ball. With the silent count he didn't have to worry about inadvertently triggering—à la Baab—the snap. Once he had things set the way he wanted, he would tap or signal Saturday, and the silent count would take over. "He could also do more to manipulate the defense with his leg, given that they had to anticipate the snap so much

more intensely," the retired center recalls.

Manning noticed another advantage. "Our timing got so good with it," he says, "we were getting fewer offensive penalties on the road than at home." The silent count was not just a remedy for the noise problem; it was also a secret weapon. During Mudd's 12 years in Indianapolis, his offensive line allowed fewer sacks than any other in the NFL, even though Manning's offense relied on passing. The Colts won the Super Bowl in 2007.

**I**N THE highly competitive world of the NFL, anything that works is quickly adopted leaguewide. As Mudd recalls, the first team to pick up the silent snap count after Indianapolis was New England. Then Pittsburgh. Coaches would call Mudd to ask about the count. That put him in a tough spot, because the Colts had come to regard it as a prized secret.

George Sefcik, the Falcons' offensive coordinator, called after Indianapolis gave his team trouble in the Georgia Dome in 1998. "Are you guys using a silent count?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Mudd.

"Well, how do you do that?"

Mudd was torn between his loyalty to the Colts and the kinship he felt with other longtime pro coaches—and he was damn proud of what he had done. "O.K., there's a rhythm that the center has after the quarterback taps him on the ass," he told Sefcik. "You guys will have to figure out the rest. I don't feel comfortable telling you every little part of it."



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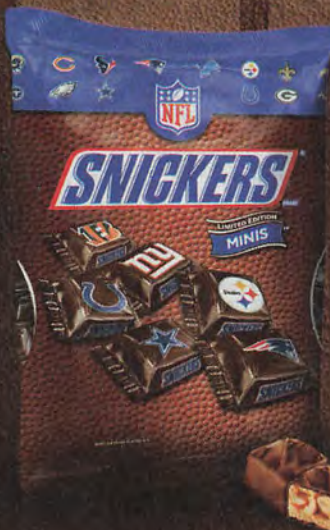
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"There's a rhythm that the center has after the quarterback taps him on the ass. You guys figure out the rest."

The Falcons figured out enough to use the count against the Vikings in the cacophonous Metrodome in the 1999 NFC title game. "My gosh," Sefcik told Mudd afterward, "that is the most incredible thing."

Some found it hard to believe how often the Colts used the snap. Mudd got a phone call one day from Juan Castillo, who was then coaching the offensive line in Philadelphia. "I know you do the silent count on every snap, right?" he said. Mudd confirmed it.

"Well, Brad Childress [the Eagles' offensive coordinator, Castillo's boss] doesn't believe you do it every snap."

"You have that son of a bitch call me," said Mudd, "and I'll tell him."

Today every team in the NFL uses the silent snap count. Many centers signal its start by turning their heads to the side once or twice, but the basics are still the ones Mudd put in place in 1998 with the Colts.

**M**OMENTS OF true vindication in a man's life are rare, but Mudd's came at a 2006 meeting of the NFL Competition Committee. He had been asked to attend as a consultant on a proposed rule change having nothing to do with the silent snap count, but during the session then Titans head coach Jeff Fisher, whose entire career as an NFL defensive coach (1985-94) had been square in the sack-happy era, launched into a sustained objection to the growing use of the silent count. Fisher complained that the count was giving offensive linemen—here it came—an *unfair advantage!* When the center lifted or turned his head to signal that the silent count had begun, Fisher argued, he violated the rule against linemen moving before the snap of the ball.

"The rule says that the center has to come to a complete stop for a full second before the ball is snapped," said Fisher. He went on about it for some time, making the same point: *It wasn't fair!*

Eventually Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren, an old offensive coordinator, started chuckling. "Jeff, when are you supposed to go on defense anyway?" he asked.

"Well, they are drawing us offside, and they are not supposed to," argued Fisher.

"Jeff, when are you supposed to go on defense?" Holmgren repeated.

"They are not coming to a full stop!"

"Jeff, when are you supposed to go?"

Finally Fisher conceded, "When the ball goes."

Howard Mudd's revolution was complete.

Complaints like Fisher's didn't go away immediately. The next year the NFL circulated a memo instructing centers to stop moving their heads a full second before snapping the ball. Otherwise refs would flag them for illegal motion. It sounded like a small thing, but the Colts had perfected the rhythm of the silent count and did not want to mess with it. So they ignored the memo. Refs found the new rule too difficult to enforce, and it went the way of flags for excessive crowd noise.

It disappeared by acclamation. □

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# To Russia, With Love

BY BRIAN BURKE →



homosexuals during the Games—but it did not back down from the enforcement of its new laws, even if that means prosecuting athletes. The IOC must push Russia to guarantee the safety of all competitors, coaches and officials, and their immunity from these laws. LGBT athletes such as American figure skater Johnny Weir and New Zealand speedskater Blake Skjellerup must be able to compete without fear of harassment. Russia must also ensure the safety and immunity of all Olympic visitors: media, guests and the families of the athletes.

I hope athletes of all sexualities and nationalities will recognize the injustices being perpetrated upon innocent people in Russia. I hope they realize that if they join voices, they can effect change. So, Olympians, when you pack your skates, pack a rainbow pin. When you practice your Russian, learn how to say, “I am pro-gay.” When you gather your winter clothes, know that You Can Play will happily outfit any Olympic athlete with complimentary You Can Play merchandise.

The pressure to do what’s right shouldn’t end with the closing ceremony. The IOC, USOC and each sport’s governing bodies should refuse to stage future international competitions in Russia until these outrageous laws are repealed. That is the boycott I’m calling for.

Russia has made the organization founded in honor of my son illegal, and it has attempted to silence our family. We refuse to recognize its right to do so. The cruel and misguided legislation will fail—laws based on ignorance, bias and bigotry always do. But until they are repealed, the LGBT citizens of Russia will suffer horribly. It’s time for all of us to stand in support of them. □

*Brian Burke is the director of player personnel for the U.S. men’s Olympic hockey team and an advisory board member for the You Can Play Project.*

→ **At the Olympics**, members of visiting nations often try to impose their political beliefs on the host. This, in my view, is wrong: Athletes are there to compete, not to protest. But when a host country enacts laws that crush basic human rights, those of us in the Olympic movement must speak up.

In June the Russian parliament passed a bill criminalizing public expressions deemed to be “pro-gay.” These acts include marching in a gay pride parade, displaying a rainbow flag—even holding hands in public with someone of the same sex. For any of those “crimes” a person can spend up to two weeks in prison.

An atmosphere of intolerance has long existed in Russia. On the streets LGBT people are harassed, intimidated and arrested by police, who have also been known to look the other way when antigay violence occurs. Perversely, this is being done in the name of morality: Russian president Vladimir Putin says the antigay laws are intended to protect the innocence of children.

I have been publicly and vocally pro-gay since 2007, when my youngest son, Brendan, came out to our family. I have tried to do what every parent should: support my son. Brendan and I did interviews together talking about the importance of LGBT acceptance in sports. Three years ago we lost Brendan, tragically, in an accident at 21, and since then

our family has fought hard to carry on his message of love and inclusivity. We have marched in pride parades, spoken at events and donated time and energy in support of young LGBT people.

All these activities are now illegal in Sochi, the city that will host the Winter Olympics, where I will be with the U.S. hockey team. Russia has criminalized my ability to be a father and our ability to be a family.

You don’t have to be gay to care about this. You don’t have to have a gay son or daughter to recognize an organized effort by a government to target and destroy a minority group. History has taught us that, left unchecked, this sort of bigotry will only escalate. The rest of the world cannot bear silent witness.

Many people have called for a boycott of the Sochi Olympics. But boycotts punish the athletes who have worked so hard to make the team. Instead, I will proudly represent the U.S., USA Hockey and the You Can Play Project, which is dedicated to ending homophobia in sports. It encourages athletes to speak out against antigay rhetoric, to support LGBT teammates and to change a culture that is often homophobic. I will be doing all this, and I will be publicly pro-gay. I am calling on other governing bodies, staffs, coaches and athletes to join me.

Last week Russia assured the IOC that it would not discriminate against



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